

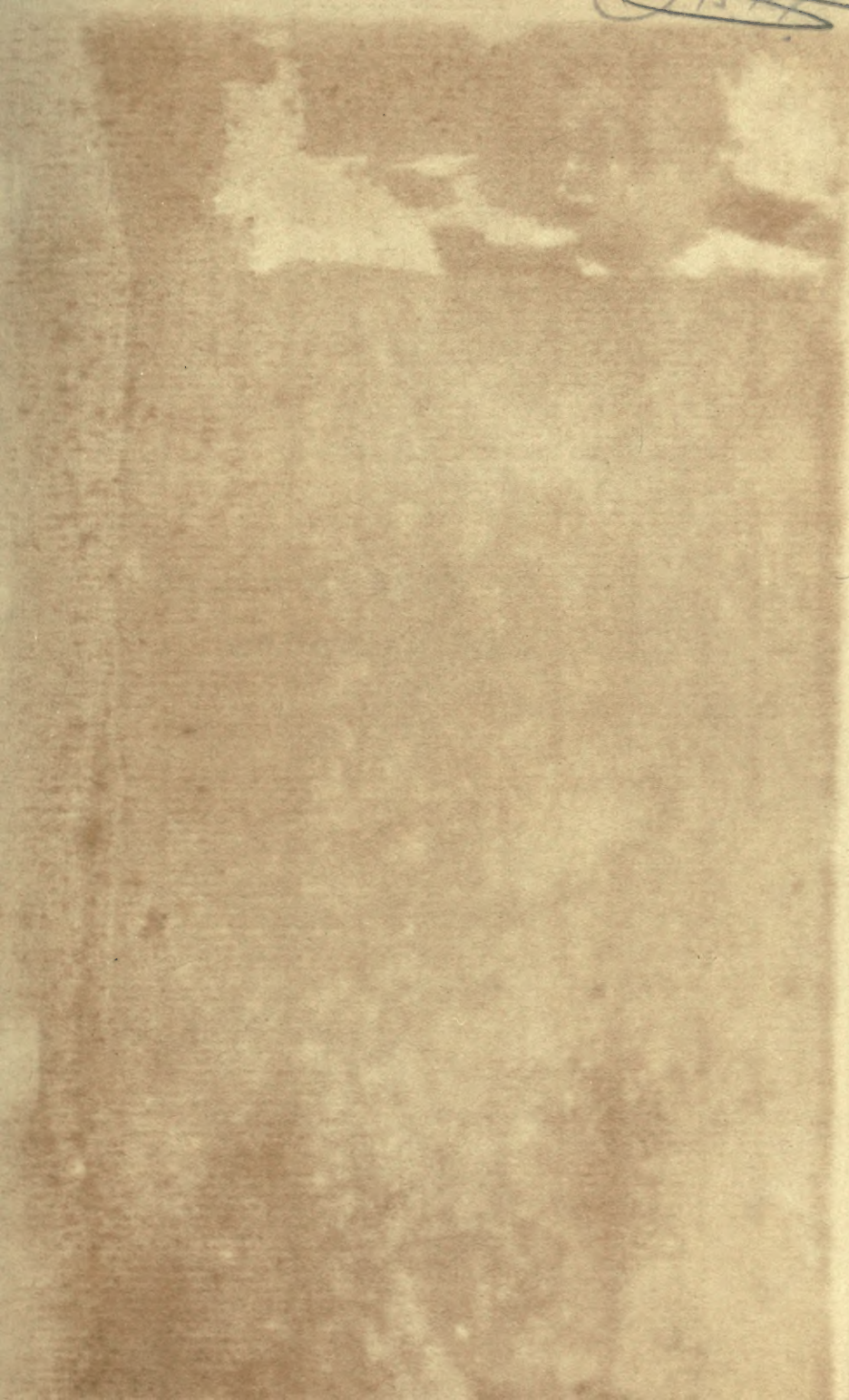
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COMEDY
QUEENS
OF THE
GEORGIAN
ERA

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COMEDY QUEENS OF THE
GEORGIAN ERA

BY THE AUTHOR OF
'COMEDY QUEENS OF THE GEORGIAN ERA'

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Strutting Actresses Peckering in a Barn.

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COMEDY QUEENS
OF
THE GEORGIAN ERA

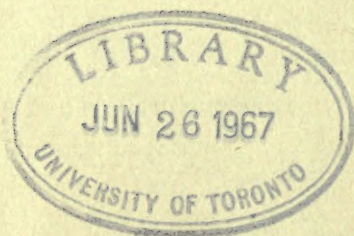
BY
JOHN FYVIE

AUTHOR OF 'SOME FAMOUS WOMEN OF WIT AND BEAUTY,'
'LITERARY ECCENTRICS,' ETC.

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PREFACE

THIS book does not profess to be a theatrical history. It is simply a series of biographical sketches of some of the most prominent English comedy actresses of the Georgian period. As Leigh Hunt remarked, most people are more eager to hear of actors and actresses than of the members of other professions, and in reading accounts of them most of us incline more to the comic than the tragic, and more to the women than the men. But a record of the strictly professional career of an actor or actress is apt to become a mere dry chronicle of successive representations. I have therefore dealt with these ladies, so far as was possible, more from the private than the professional point of view ; and I hope that, in addition to the interest of the separate personalities, these brief biographies may be found to have a further interest as a series of character-sketches of a dozen representative women who, in the course of the eighteenth century, attained to eminence in the only profession then open to their sex. There is also another reason for dealing with them from the personal rather than from the professional standpoint. Colley Cibber lamented that the animated graces of the player could live no longer than 'the instant breath and motion

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that presents them.' Even in these days of bioscope and phonograph, the disability remains. When the curtain falls and the play is played, all 'the youth, the grace, the charm, the glow' pass into an oblivion from which they can never be resuscitated. But behind the mask there is always a human being; and more often than not, one of a peculiarly interesting type. Moreover, the lives of few women in any station of life contain such adventures, or exhibit such vicissitudes as do those of actresses; and the reader will find, in the authentic records of the careers of these twelve women, stories as strange as any to be found in the whole range of fiction.

Nothing is more evanescent than the actor's fame; and notwithstanding the *Memoirs*, which some of these ladies wrote for themselves and which others had written for them, they have mostly left only the vaguest memory behind. So far as their professional fascination is concerned, this was inevitable; so far as their personality is concerned, it is by no means unintelligible. For, truth to say, in spite of their varied attractiveness, their high spirits, their frankness, their humour, even the best of the theatrical memoirs of the eighteenth century are usually so garrulous, so long-winded, so incoherent, so inaccurate; and some of them are so illiterate, vulgar, and positively indecent, that few modern readers have the patience to wade through them. But there is good stuff in some of these old and mostly forgotten *Memoirs*, if a man will but observingly distil it out. In the following sketches I have

endeavoured to extract the essence of a whole library of such productions. It will be seen by experts that I have formed an estimate of the characters of some of these once-celebrated ladies which is different from that traditionally held; but in a book intended for the general reader it was considered unadvisable to encumber the pages with footnotes; and the sources of information on which I have relied will be found sufficiently indicated in the text. I regret to have to say that I have been unable to examine the 335 letters from Mrs. Jordan to the Duke of Clarence (afterwards William iv.), which were sold at Sotheby's in May last; and that other possessors of letters and documents relating to Mrs. Jordan have been unwilling to let me see them.

J. F.

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INTRODUCTION

WE shall be very apt to form an erroneous estimate of the characters of the stage stars whose romantic careers form the subject of this volume, if we fail to remind ourselves at the outset of the great difference between the social position of actors and actresses in the present day and their status in the eighteenth century. They had by no means then emerged from the shadow of traditional classical and ecclesiastical degradation. Plato had banished plays and players, as well as poetry and poets, from his ideal Republic. Aristotle had held that the law should forbid young people to witness comedies. Tacitus had significantly remarked that the German women kept their honour out of harm's way by reason of there being no play-houses amongst them. Cicero had put it on record that from the earliest times the Romans had counted all stage-plays discreditable and scandalous, insomuch that any Roman who turned actor was disincorporated and unnaturalised by order of the Censors. Livy had said that common players were not thought good enough for common soldiers. The Christian Church had carried on the tradition. The first and second Councils of Arles had laid down a canon of excommunication against players, so long as they continued to act. Another Council in A.D. 424 had declared 'that the testimony of people of ill-reputation, of players, and others of such scandalous employments, shall not be admitted against any person.' And the general

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opinion of the Church throughout the Middle Ages appears to have been in agreement with St. Augustine, who commended the Romans for refusing the *Jus Civitatis* to players. After the rise of the secular drama in our own country, the 39 Eliz. Cap. 4, and the 1 Jac. Cap. 7 enacted that 'all bear-wards, common players of interludes, counterfeit Egyptians, etc., shall be taken, adjudged, and deemed Rogues and Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars, and shall sustain all pain and punishment as by this Act is in that be-behalf appointed'; and although the first of these Acts excepted those players who belonged to a Baron or other personage of higher degree, and were authorised to play under the hand and seal of such Baron or personage, the second Act made no such exception. Macaulay relates that at the trial of Lord Mohun by his peers for the murder of William Mountford, an actor, in 1692, when the peers, by sixty-nine to fourteen, acquitted their accused brother, one great nobleman could not understand why so great a fuss should be made about so small a matter, seeing that 'after all, the fellow was but a player, and players are rogues.' According to a statute passed in the last year of Queen Anne's reign, country actors were still reckoned among rogues and vagabonds; and as recently as 1809, a writer on the subject declared that the penalty of imprisonment (though not of whipping) had been enforced against country actors of eminence 'within living memory.' In the earlier part of the eighteenth century anybody might insult an actor with impunity; and if he were thrashed by a person of quality, neither he nor anybody else would have dreamed that he had any right to retaliate. Of course, in the theatrical profession, as in every other, there have always been exceptional individuals whose character and abilities (especially if they managed to acquire a little wealth) have raised them into the highest society of their time. But in

the case of actors it was always quite apparent that they were only there on sufferance, and were tolerated because they were amusing. It was thought a stinging satire, for example, when 'Junius,' incidentally addressing Garrick, wrote—'now mark me, *vagabond*; keep to your pantomimes or be assured you shall hear of it.' For a parallel to this we should have to imagine that a clerk in a Government office could feel his social position to be so infinitely above that of an actor as to justify him in using such language to a Tree or a Wyndham.

Everybody knows what were Dr. Johnson's sentiments about play-actors. When some one once spoke of the meanness of flattering the Queen on the stage, Johnson warmly asked how that, or anything else, could be mean in 'a player—a showman—a fellow who exhibits himself for a shilling.' And when Richardson's opinion of Cibber was cited, the old moralist became very scornful on the absurdity of talking about *respect* for a *player*! 'Do you *respect* a rope-dancer, or a ballad-singer?' said he; 'what, sir, a fellow who claps a hump on his back and a lump on his legs and cries *I am Richard the Third*?' In 1762, in his farce of *The Liar*, Foote made the valet, Papillon, say—'Some would have me turn player, and others Methodist preacher; but as I had not money to build me a tabernacle, I did not think this would answer; and as to *player*, whatever might happen to me, I was determined not to bring disgrace upon my family, so I resolved to turn footman.' If this should be thought exaggeration suitable only for a farce, read in what terms Lady Mary Montagu could refer to an alliance with a player some few years previously, and Horace Walpole to a similar event some few years afterwards. In 1739 Lady Henrietta Herbert married John Beard, the theatrical singer. In the *General Biographical Dictionary* Beard is spoken of as a most delightful com-

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panion, whether as host or guest, and as having fulfilled the respective duties of a son, a brother, a guardian, a friend, and a husband, in a most exemplary manner. This is how my lady speaks of an alliance with such a man:—

‘Lady Harriet Herbert furnished the tea-tables here with fresh tattle for this last fortnight. I was one of the first informed of her adventures by Lady Gaze, who was told that morning by a priest that she had desired him to marry her the next day to Beard, who sings in the farce at Drury Lane. He refused her that good office, and immediately told Lady Gaze, who . . . was frightened . . . and asked my advice. I told her honestly that since the lady was capable of such amours, I did not doubt if this was broke off, she would bestow her person on some hackney-coachman or chairman, and that I really saw no method of saving her from ruin.’

Later on, she reports that Lady Harriet (who, it may be mentioned, was no young inexperienced girl, but a widow who had arrived at years of discretion), has returned to London; ‘and some people believe her married, others that he is too intimidated by Mr. Waldegrave’s threat to dare to go through the ceremony.’ In 1773, Lady Susan Strange-ways, daughter of Lord Ilchester, as soon as she came of age, slipped quietly out of her father’s house one fine day, and was promptly married to William O’Brien, the comedian—always, by the way, described in peerages and similar publications as ‘William O’Brien, Esq., of Stinsford, Dorsetshire.’ Horace Walpole was aghast at this ‘sad misfortune,’ and wrote to one of his aristocratic correspondents:—

‘Poor Lord Ilchester is almost distracted; indeed it is the completion of disgrace—even a footman were preferable; the publicity of the hero’s profession perpetuates the mortification. . . . I could not have believed that Lady Susan would have stooped so low.’

As for actresses they were considered very fit and proper

persons to become the mistresses of peers and other fine gentlemen—and whenever they would not readily come to terms it was thought quite excusable if amorous noblemen kidnapped them for the purpose; but they were held to be very unfit to become gentlemen's wives, or even the wives of middle-class persons of character and substance. The exceptions—which are mostly cases of actresses raised to the peerage—may be held to prove the rule. Throughout the whole of the eighteenth century there were only three such cases; for Miss Mellon's marriage to the Duke of St. Albans did not take place until 1827, after she had figured for some time as the millionaire widow of the banker, Coutts. The first case (which did not come within the scope of the present volume), was that of Mrs. Anastasia Robinson, who was secretly married to the Earl of Peterborough about 1722. The Earl was not ashamed to live with the lady as his supposed mistress, but he was ashamed for it to be known that she was his wife, and only acknowledged the fact when on his death-bed, some thirteen years after the ceremony had taken place. Lavinia Fenton, as will be seen in its proper place, lived for twenty-three years with the Duke of Bolton as his mistress before he married her. So that the only marriage from the stage to the peerage throughout the whole of the eighteenth century, which is comparable to those with which we have become familiar in our own day, is that of Miss Farren to the Earl of Derby in 1797.

In addition to the classical and ecclesiastical tradition, which so adversely affected the social status of the actor in the eighteenth century, the actress had to encounter the tradition of immorality attaching to her in consequence of the notoriously scandalous lives of the earlier English actresses in the profligate days of Charles II. It is not quite correct to say, as Cibber does, that 'before the

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Restoration no actress had ever been seen on the English stage.' Actresses, imported from France, were occasionally seen on the English stage during the reign of Charles I.; but we hear that they were called very unsavoury names, and often 'hissed, hooted, and pippin-pelted' off the boards. Unquestionably, however, the introduction of women was the great theatrical event of the Restoration period. Before that time the characters of women were performed by boys, or by young men of effeminate aspect. Pepys records in his diary that one day in 1660 he saw a boy named Kynaston act the part of the Duke's sister, and that he made 'the loveliest lady that ever I saw in my life.' On another occasion, he says that Kynaston appeared in three shapes: first as a poor woman in ordinary clothes; then as a lady in fine clothes, in which he was clearly the prettiest woman in the whole house; and lastly as a man, when he likewise appeared to be the handsomest man in the house. But the King, as well as many of his Court, had become accustomed to actresses on the Continent; and in the Patents which he granted to Davenant and to Killigrew for the formation of two companies of comedians, to be called the King's Servants and the Duke's Servants respectively, it is expressly stipulated that 'for as much as the women's parts therein have been acted by men in the habits of women, at which some have taken offence . . . We do likewise permit and give leave that all the women's parts to be acted in either of the said two companies for the time to come may be performed by women.' Very soon afterwards we find Pepys noting in his Diary—'By coach to the theatre, and there saw the *Scornful Lady*, now done by a woman, which makes the play much better than ever it did to me.' But a later entry of his, for the 5th October, 1667, shows us something of the seamy side of the innovation:—

‘To the King’s house : and there, going in, met with Knipp, and she took us up into the tiring-rooms : and to the women’s shift, where Nell [Gwyn] was dressing herself, and was all unready, and is very pretty, prettier than I thought. And into the scene-room, and there sat down, and she gave us fruit ; and here I read the questions to Knipp, while she answered me, through all her part of *Flora’s Figarys*, which was acted to-day. But, Lord ! to see how they were both painted would make a man mad, and did make me loathe them ; and what base company of men comes among them, and how lewdly they talk !’

In point of decency, neither the plays nor the players of the eighteenth century—or at least of the earlier half of the eighteenth century—appear to have been any improvement on those of the Restoration period. After Jeremy Collier’s attack on the immorality of the stage in 1698, some slight attempt was made to check the licence, not so much of the dramatists as of the performers ; and there were some few prosecutions of players for using indecent expressions—*Betterton* and *Mrs. Bracegirdle*, two of the best and most decent of the performers, being, curiously enough, the first to be fined. But the improvement was temporary as well as slight ; and *George II.* was not only not displeased to witness immoral dramas, but even encouraged and commanded the restoration of scenes in some of the older plays which actors and managers had dropped as too indecent for representation. Religious prejudice against the stage and all its works during the first half of the eighteenth century was by no means so strong as it had been during the days of the early Puritans, nor as it became later on, under the influence of the Evangelicals and the Methodists. But in 1711 both Houses of Convocation strongly condemned the immorality of the theatre ; and in 1735 *Sir John Bernard* complained in the House of Commons that the six theatres then open in London were nothing better than centres of corruption.

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The dramatic taste of the eighteenth century—at least until Garrick began his Shakespearean revival in the second half of it—was terribly low. A pompous piece, filled with rant, and butchery, and bloodthirstiness, was its ideal of tragedy. And what its notion of comedy was like may be estimated from the extraordinary and unprecedented success of *The Beggar's Opera*. Those were not the days of long runs. When in 1750, Garrick and Barry played as rival Romeos, at the two houses, for eight successive performances, the public were disgusted with so much of one thing and demanded more variety. But in 1727 *The Beggar's Opera* ran for sixty-three nights in London, and fifty nights in Bristol and in Bath. In 1759, with Beard as Macheath and Miss Brent as Polly, it ran for thirty-seven nights consecutively and fifty-two in all, during the season, so that, as Davies reports, it seriously affected the legitimate drama at Drury Lane, Shakespeare and Garrick having to quit the field in favour of Beard and Brent. In 1781 Colman produced the piece at the Haymarket, with all the women's parts sustained by men, and all the men's parts by women; a highly popular performance. And not only in London but throughout the country, from 1727 to the end of the century, every species of performers attempted it, from Theatres Royal to barns and puppet-shows. Cook, in his life of Macklin, tells us that when it was performed at Barnstaple in 1790 the Macheath had but *one eye*, the Polly but *one arm*, and the songs were supported in the orchestra by a solitary accompanist who *whistled* the tunes! A brief account of this famous piece, which is a mere name to the modern playgoer, will be found in the sketch of Lavinia Fenton, the first and most famous of Pollys. The like of Pope and Swift, or of Walpole and Chesterfield, may have regarded it purely as a satire—on the public taste as well as the public morality. But the bulk of the audiences

were charmed with the gallantry of Macheath, the highwayman. Cibber says that if the merit of plays is to be measured by the full houses they have brought, *The Beggar's Opera* must be set down as the best-written play that ever an English theatre had to boast of. Its moral influence may be estimated from the fact that Sir John Fielding, the magistrate, publicly remonstrated with Garrick against its revival, and that he showed Kelly his record books, which proved that after every successful run of the piece, from its first representation, there had been a proportionately large number of highwaymen brought to his court.

Such being the character of the most popular plays, let us now take a glance at the theatres and the audiences. In the time of Charles the Second there had been only two theatres in London, and even these proved too many; for in 1684 the two companies—the King's and the Duke's servants—amalgamated. Early in the eighteenth century there was a similar amalgamation for a time, when the theatre in the Haymarket was appropriated to Italian Opera while Drury Lane remained devoted to plays. In 1709 the Haymarket house was closed for a time by order of the Lord Chamberlain, and after its re-opening, both plays and operas were performed there. In 1714 a playhouse was opened in Lincoln's Inn Fields; in 1720, a new theatre was built in the Haymarket; in 1729 another was opened in Goodman's Fields, and in 1733 Covent Garden was finished for Rich and his Company. In 1737, in consequence of an attempt by Fielding to make the drama a vehicle of political satire, an Act was passed prohibiting the representation of any performance not previously licensed by the Lord Chamberlain. The real cause for this was that Walpole and the corruption of parliamentary elections and methods had been held up to ridicule; the ostensible cause was an attack on the royal family. A play called the *Golden*

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Rump, said to have been offered to the manager of Lincoln's Inn theatre, which contained a bitter satire on the King and the reigning family, was by him handed over to Walpole, and some extracts from this scandalous production which Walpole read to the House of Commons at once secured the passing of his bill. It has since been suspected that the play was never intended for representation, but had been written to Walpole's order, to enable him to crush anything in the nature of a political comedy. The Act had other effects as well as this. The 12 Anne Cap. 23 had placed all actors in the category of Rogues and Vagabonds. Walpole's Act restricted this to those who acted without authority by Patent from the King, or by licence from the Lord Chamberlain. It also provided that neither the Crown nor the Lord Chamberlain should have power to authorise theatrical performances for money in any part of Great Britain, except in the city of Westminster, and in places where the King happened to be residing for the time being. But the taste for theatrical performances had been rapidly growing; and this provision was so strongly in conflict with public opinion that it was practically inoperative. Not only were the old theatres in the provincial towns not suppressed, but new ones sprang up. In the latter part of the reign of George II. and the early part of the reign of George III. there were dramatic performances, either by local players or by actors from London or Dublin, in almost every town. There was a company at York, which served all the chief towns in the county; a company at Bath, which covered the western district; a company at Portsmouth, which regularly visited Plymouth and Exeter. Ireland was well served with theatres; and in 1746 one was opened in the Canongate in Edinburgh. Patents for Theatres Royal were granted in 1767 for Edinburgh; in 1768 for Bath and Norwich; in 1769 for York and Hull; in 1771 for Liverpool;

in 1775 for Manchester ; in 1777 for Chester ; and in 1778 for Bristol ; while in 1788 an Act was passed enabling magistrates (under certain restrictions) to authorise performances where they pleased.

The behaviour of London audiences during the eighteenth century calls for a few remarks. It must be remembered that from the time of the Restoration until well into the Georgian period the 'quality' arrogated to themselves the privilege of invading the stage while the play was being acted ; so that actors and actresses had frequently to elbow their way to the front through a mob ; and although the suppression of this was attempted in 1704, it was not done away with for many years afterwards. Edmund Bell-chambers tells us, in a note to his edition of Cibber's *Apology*, that it was a custom in the London theatres, till about the middle of the eighteenth century, to erect an amphitheatre across the stage from one front wing to the other, with rows of benches, more or less in number, which not only destroyed the effect, but greatly incommoded the business, of the performance. In some instances these seats rose so high that hats and bonnets appeared above the trees and amongst the clouds of the scenery.

'A single entrance was left upon each side next the stage door, which was often choked up with bystanders, and the feats of Bosworth Field, amidst drums, trumpets, battle-axes and spears, were enacted between two audiences, where Richard spoke his last soliloquy and his dying lines upon a carpet no bigger than a table-cloth.'

This custom was encouraged by the actors for the sake of the extra money thus to be got for seats at their benefits ; and when Garrick resolved to do away with it entirely in 1762, they made a great outcry, thinking they should lose heavily. But it can never have been acceptable to the playgoers, and there were frequent bickerings between the

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two audiences thus created—that before and that behind the curtain. This accounts for a note sometimes to be seen at the foot of old playbills: ‘*N.B.*—There will be no building on the stage.’ In 1721, while Macbeth and his lady were performing their parts, a tipsy earl crossed the Haymarket stage to speak to one of his boon companions on the other side of the house; and when Rich, the manager, remonstrated with him, the insolent nobleman gave him a slap in the face—which the courageous manager unexpectedly returned. Half a dozen beaux instantly drew their swords and leaped on to the stage to take vengeance for such a sacrilegious act; and had not Quin and other members of the company come to the rescue with their handy theatrical weapons in their hands, it is probable that there would have been a real murder in that evening’s performance. After this awkward incident the King ordered a guard of soldiers to attend every performance at each of the Patent Houses,—a custom which lingered to within living memory, long after the reason for it had been forgotten. Dr. Doran says that in the first half of the century people in the boxes were in the habit of spitting into the pit! It is to be hoped that the habit was not general; but it is certainly on record that on one occasion when a well-known actress by her powerful representation of the character of Mrs. Beverley had hushed the house into a condition of breathless silence, a little Jew suddenly started up and cried out fiercely: ‘My Got! who vas dat shpit in my eye?’ A collection of old newspaper cuttings made by Charles Mathews, the comedian, and now preserved in the Forster collection at South Kensington, furnishes a number of curious illustrations of the conditions under which actors had to play their parts in the eighteenth century. In February 1772 it appears to have been necessary to put out the following advertisement—

‘We are desired to acquaint the *Gods* of both theatres that should any person lose their life by throwing of a bottle or other dangerous implement, it will, upon conviction, (and it can’t be done so secretly as to escape observation), be deemed murder to all intents and purposes, and that to the entire satisfaction of many humane people, who have beheld this savage and unpardonable practice with the greatest concern and indignation.’

In May of the same year, another newspaper records a disturbance at Drury Lane theatre (happily, however, of a less dangerous character than the foregoing), occasioned by a person in the shilling gallery who insisted on singing some popular songs. The pit was exceedingly displeased, and remonstrated strongly; the galleries, on the other hand, were hugely delighted, and repeatedly encored this unauthorised programme. The dispute interrupted the advertised performance for over half an hour; and in the end the gallery performer had to be allowed to finish his singing before the play could go on. Ten years later than this, a young German clergyman named Moritz paid a visit to the Haymarket theatre during his travels in England in 1782. The prices, he notes, were 5s. for a seat in the boxes, 3s. for the pit, 2s. for the first gallery, and 1s. for the top gallery.

‘It is the tenants in this upper gallery, who, for their shilling, make all the noise and uproar for which the English playhouses are so famous. I was in the pit, which gradually rises, amphitheatre-wise, from the orchestra, and is furnished with benches, one above another, from the top to the bottom. Often and often, whilst I sat there, did a rotten orange, or pieces of the peel of an orange, fly past me, or past some of my neighbours, and once one of them actually hit my hat, without my daring to look round, for fear another might hit me on the face. . . . Besides this perpetual pelting from the gallery, which renders an English playhouse so uncomfortable, there is no end to their calling out, and knocking with their sticks, till the curtain is drawn up. . . . I sometimes heard, too, the people in the lower or middle gallery quarrelling with those of the upper one. Behind me in the pit sat a young fop, who, in order to display his

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costly shoe-buckles with the utmost brilliancy, continually put his foot on my bench, and even sometimes on my coat. . . . In the boxes, quite in a corner, sat several servants, who were said to be placed there to keep the seats for the families they served. . . . They seemed to sit remarkably close and still, the reason of which, I was told, was their apprehension of being pelted ; for if one of them does but look out of the box, he is immediately saluted with a shower of orange-peel from the gallery.'

One of Charles Mathews's newspaper-cuttings contains a letter from a disgusted playgoer, dated January 1776, protesting against this custom of 'permitting a footman to sit for an act or two of a play next to a woman of the first quality, by way of securing a place for his absent master.' The indecency of the practice is said to be aggravated by the usual choice of the dirtiest servant of the family for this duty—'for the Men of Parade and Figure are to prance before the Lady's Chair with lighted Flambeaux, or hang like a Rope of Onions behind her Coach.' As a remedy for the nuisance, the writer of this letter made the revolutionary suggestion that the sittings in the boxes should be numbered ; a plan which does not seem to have occurred to any one previously, and which was not adopted till long afterwards. The footmen appear to have been a nuisance in more ways than one. After keeping places in the boxes for their employers during the first acts of a play, they claimed the right of free admission to the top gallery to witness the remainder of the performance. From 1697 to 1780, the upper gallery appears to have been open gratis to all footmen in livery ; and an attempt to expel them from Drury Lane in 1737 led to a serious riot. Another of Mathews's cuttings, dated 5th March 1737, tells us that—

'Last Saturday night a great number of footmen assembled together with sticks, staves, and other offensive weapons, in a tumultuous and riotous manner, and broke open the doors at

Drury Lane play-house, for not being let into what they call *their Gallery*, and fought their way in so desperate a manner to the stage-door (which they forced open) that near thirty persons were dangerously wounded in the fray.'

Riots of one kind or another were pretty frequent occurrences. In 1740, when the audience were disappointed by the non-appearance of a certain French dancer, the ladies were all first very carefully handed out of the pit and then the 'gentlemen,' led by a noble marquis (who would have set fire to the house if others had not prevented him), smashed the musical instruments, pulled down the decorations and fittings, broke up the benches, and destroyed everything they could lay hands upon. In 1743, thirty prize-fighters employed by Garrick's friends fought in the pit of Drury Lane with a similar band of boxers employed by the friends of Macklin. In 1749 such a riot occurred in consequence of the introduction of a troupe of French players at the Haymarket, that the guards were called in upon the stage. In 1754, Garrick's employment of foreign dancers in his 'Chinese Festival,' so offended the patriotic sentiments of the groundlings that they protested with violence against the introduction of the undesirable aliens. When the pitites stormed, however, the gentlemen in the boxes drew their swords and leaped down to support the management by pricking the rowdy dissentients into submission. But they had miscalculated their forces; and when the mob had smitten the quality hip and thigh, they proceeded to demolish the interior of the theatre. In 1762, the abolition of the half-price caused a similar riot. In 1770, there was a riot to prevent the dramatist Kelly having a benefit. A hand-bill was distributed amongst the audience setting forth that that evening's performance at Drury Lane was to be for Kelly's benefit, who was described as a comic writer whose abilities were contemptible,

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and a politician whose principles were detestable. Forces seemed about equally divided; one part of the audience insisting that the play (*False Delicacy*) should be performed, another being equally resolute to prevent it. After the conflicting shouters had rendered any performance impossible for some time, Garrick came forward and desired that the audience would be pleased to direct him what to do. He was then asked whether that night's performance was for the benefit of Mr. Kelly. He assured them that it was not; and proposed, as the only method of quieting everybody, to dismiss the house. But this was not agreed to; and after an hour's delay the play began. It was acted to the end, notwithstanding the hissing, shouting, clapping screaming, and apple-throwing that continued throughout. One of the newspaper comments on the incident is as follows:—

‘No excuse can be made for the cruel treatment of the performers on these occasions, who are certainly innocent objects, and should by no means be pelted at, like criminals in the pillory. But on Tuesday humanity gave place to savageness and fury; the women were pelted indiscriminately with the men, and Mrs. Baddeley was so disconcerted by an apple which was thrown at her, that such of the audience as were not quite destitute of feeling, trembled for her situation.’

All this occurred in what was considered the polite society of the capital. But as a high provincial reputation was always the best introduction an actor or an actress could have to one of the great London managers, we must also take a glance at the provincial theatres; and, as these recruited their forces from the most promising of the strollers, it will be necessary likewise to say a few words about the itinerant fraternity—from which (to name no others), Elizabeth Farren, Countess of Derby, and Harriot Mellon, Duchess of St. Albans originally sprang. Perhaps the best way of

enabling the reader to realise what provincial theatre life was like in the eighteenth century will be to select a few of the typical experiences of Tate Wilkinson and John Bernard. Tate Wilkinson was the son of a Dr. Wilkinson, chaplain to Frederick, Prince of Wales. After having achieved considerable success as an actor in Dublin and at Drury Lane, Tate became patentee of the Theatre Royal at York, which, under his management, was the professional nursery of Mrs. Inchbald and Mrs. Jordan, of Fawcett and Kemble, and various other actors and actresses of renown. Even after he had become Patentee of the York Theatre, he tells us, he was frequently treated as though he were little better than a rogue and a vagabond. If he happened to produce a play which the quality who attended the York races could interpret as in any way reflecting on their conduct and way of life, these touchy persons objected to having the mirror held up to them, and peremptorily commanded him to take it off the stage. When he appeared as 'Major Sturgeon,' the local militia took it as an insult to their officers, and he was not only threatened with a riot if he repeated the performance, but a sergeant and six soldiers were sent to the theatre with orders to beat him unmercifully and then duck him in the river; a punishment which he only escaped by disguising himself as a livery servant, and lighting some of the company to their home. Once when he was attending to the rehearsal of Foote's farce, *The Author*, he was sent for by a party of gentlemen to their dining-room in a neighbouring inn, when one of them haughtily addressed him as follows:—

'My name, Mr. Wilkinson, is Apreece, and the character of Cadwallader you mean to perform is an affront to the memory of my father (who is now dead): as his son, by G—d, I will not suffer such insolence to pass either unnoticed or unpunished; therefore if to-night you dare attempt or presume to play that

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farce, myself and friends are determined, one and all, not to leave a bench or scene in your theatre.'

Even when his patrons were pleased, they did not treat him much more civilly than when they were displeased. A gentleman of position, highly esteemed throughout the spacious county of York, once desired to patronise a play. Wilkinson, as was usual on such occasions, sent his treasurer with the catalogue; but after looking over a long list of tragedies, comedies, and farces, this gentleman could not determine what to select, and desired that Mr. Wilkinson himself would attend him and his party, after dinner, at the inn where he then for a few days resided. Wilkinson of course obeyed the mandate; and it might perhaps have been expected that the Patentee of the York theatre would have been favoured with a seat at their board. The following, however, is his account of his reception:—

'After waiting a considerable time in the bar, I was at length ushered into the room where the company had dined, when Sir ——— beckoned me to approach him at the upper end of the table, where I impertinently expected to have sat down; but neither found a vacancy, or the waiter even ordered to produce me a chair. Sir ——— discoursed relative to the play—then of York city; graciously observed I had acted Bayes so as to merit his approbation; and to heighten the compliment remarked he was no judge, as he seldom visited the theatre, either in London or elsewhere. At length he condescendingly asked me to drink a glass of wine, which I begged to decline; but he requested a worthy and respectable gentleman . . . to give me a glass, which he handed to me as if I had been a common porter waiting for a message; for I actually stood all the while at the back of their chairs.'

If this were the treatment accorded to a well-to-do manager, we may imagine how his poor actors and actresses must have suffered. When a player had a benefit, he was expected to return thanks after the play; and if he were married, both

husband and wife were expected to appear together. If he could produce four or five children to bow and courtesy, the ladies were particularly pleased; and Wilkinson relates that on one such occasion Frodsham spoke a comic epilogue, and actually carried his wife on and off the stage, on his back, to comply with the expected homage. The draggle-tailed wife, as well as the husband, would have tramped already perhaps, through rain or hail or snow, from door to door, delivering the benefit play-bills, and pressing the sale of their tickets. 'Good God!' exclaims Wilkinson, some time after this degrading custom had been abolished, 'to actually behold Mr. Frodsham, bred as a gentleman, with fine natural talents, and esteemed in York as a Garrick, running after and stopping a gentleman on horseback to deliver his benefit-bill, and beg half-a-crown, then the price of the boxes!'

John Bernard, whose father was a lieutenant in the navy, and his mother the daughter of a post-captain, who was brought up in easy circumstances, and destined for a reputable profession, was bitten with stage-mania, and went a-strolling. After a variety of wanderings, he obtained a regular engagement at the Norwich Theatre at 30s. a week, and subsequently became a well-known actor in London, and secretary of the celebrated Beef-steak Club. When Bernard was in Dublin in 1782-3, that city boasted of three theatres. The first house to open for the season was Crawford's, who, by virtue of his Patent, was bound to commence with a free night. Soon after the doors were opened the house was packed in every part. The play was *Douglas*, performed, for this occasion only, by the understrappers of the company. The part of Glenalvon was played by an inferior actor named Barret, who was dressed in an entire suit of black, 'with a black wig, and a black velvet hat crowned with an immense plume of black feathers, which,

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bending before him, gave him very much the aspect of a mourning-coach horse.' He assumed the manner of Mossop, and was received by his numerous friends with thundering applause. But some of the more intimate ones took a dislike to the costume and interrupted him by calling: 'Paddy Barret; Paddy Barret!' of which he took no notice. They then called for 'a groan for Mr. Barret'; but the actor had heard that sort of thing before, and solemnly proceeded with his part. At last, together with the imperative question—'Divil burn ye, Paddy Barret! will ye lave off spaking to that lady and listen?', came a well-aimed potato.

'The potato triumphed; and the actor, walking forward to the lamps, desired to be acquainted with his patron's wishes.—"Put some powder in your jasey, you black-looking coal-heaver." "Oh! is that all you want, my jewel. Why didn't you say so before. Surely I'll do that thing. But I have onnly to tell you, my darlings, that I'm a Scotch jontleman to-night, and not Mr. Benjamin Barret, and so——, ——!"—"Get out wid your dirtiness, Paddy, you chimney-swaper! You tragedy crow! Do you think to bother us with your black looks? Go and powder your jasey, you divil's own body-boxmaker!"—"Oh, to be sure, I'll do that thing." Saying which, he made a low bow and retreated to the green-room, leaving the audience, and Lord and Lady Randolph to amuse themselves *ad interim* as they pleased.'

When he came back, however, it appeared that the barber had not only deluged his wig with powder, but shaken it also over his face and clothes, and he was received with a shout of laughter that threatened to rend the roof. He tried to proceed, but exclamations such as 'Arrah! the boy's been in a snow-storm!' or 'By the Powers! he has put his head in a flower-sack!' together with yells and groans, made a chorus that was too much for him.

'He then came forward a second time to enquire their wishes: "Leedies and jontlemen, what may it plase ye to want now?"

"Put some paint on your nose," was the reply. "What!" "Put some paint on your nose, you ghost alive!" "Paint my nose to play tragedy! Oh, bad luck to your taste! I'll tell you what, Terrence M'Mulligan, and you, Larry Casey, with your two ugly mugs up in the boxes yonder, I see how it is: the Devil himself wouldn't please ye to-night; so you may just come down and play the karakter yourselves, for the ghost of another line will I never speak to-night." Saying which, he took off his wig, and shaking its powder at them contemptuously, walked off the stage with a truly tragical strut.'

Bernard had joined Daly's company, which at that time included Digges and the Kembles, and one day they all received an invitation to attend a performance at the Mallow Theatre, when they witnessed another typically Irish scene.

'Our amusement commenced the instant we entered the house, in listening to a conversation that was going on between the gallery and the orchestra, the latter composed of a performer on the violin and one on the big drum. "Mr. Patrick Moriarty!" shouted the combiner of horse-hair and cat-gut, "how are you, my jewel?" "Aisy and impudent, Teddy O'Hoone; how are you? How's your sow?" "Mischievous and tender, like all of her sex. What tune would it please ye to have, Mr. Patrick Moriarty?" Mr. Patrick was indifferent, and referred the matter to a committee of females. In the meantime, Teddy began to tune up, at which another of his "divine" companions above assailed him: "Arrah! Teddy O'Hoone! Teddy, you devil!" "What do you say, Larry Kennedy?" "Tip us a tune on your fiddle-de-de, and don't stand there making the creature quake like a hog in a holly-bush. Paddy Byrne" (this to the drummer). "What do you say, Mr. Kennedy?" "An't you a jewel, now, to be setting there at your aise, when here's a whole cock-loft full of jontlemen come to hear you thomp your big bit of cow-hide on the top of a butter-tub."

A popular air was now decided on, and a general dance ensued, shaking down a shower of dust on the clothes of those below. Presently the unfortunate fiddler broke a

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string, which being looked upon as a personal affront, the gentlemen upstairs, who had evidently come prepared for contingencies, not only discharged a hurricane of epithets too choice for publication, but also a volley of potatoes, which they fired with such vigour and accuracy that the orchestra had to beat a speedy retreat. Calm was only restored by the manager coming forward to explain that the breaking of the string was a pure accident, and by Messrs Thaddeus O'Hoone and Patrick Byrne making a humble apology.

The theatres of Dublin and of Bath were much on a level, both as regards appointments and players, with the theatres of London; but in the earlier half of the eighteenth century provincial towns of considerable importance possessed nothing better than the theatre which Manager Jackson, a dramatic wanderer well known in the West of England, had established for the delectation of the people of Plymouth and its neighbourhood. Bernard gives us an admirable detailed description of the place.

‘He had engaged the largest room at the Black Bull, suspended a collection of green tatters along its middle for a curtain, erected a pair of paper screens, right hand and left, for wings; arranged four candles in front of said wings to divide the stage from the orchestra (the fiddlers’ chairs being the legitimate division of the orchestra from the pit), and with all the spare benches of the inn to form boxes, and a hoop suspended from the ceiling (perforated with a dozen nails, to receive as many tallow candles), to suggest the idea of a chandelier; he had constructed and embellished what he denominated a theatre! The scenery consisted of two drops, simply and comprehensively divisible into the inside of a house and the outside of a house. The former (which was an original of about the same date as the manager) was a *bonâ fide* representation at bottom of a kitchen with all the culinary implements arranged about it; but by the simple introduction of two chairs and a table, this was constituted a gentleman’s parlour! and in the further presence of a crimson-cushioned, yellow-legged

elbow chair, with a banner behind, and a stool in front, was elevated into a royal hall of audience! . . . The other drop (which I have termed outside of a house) was somewhat younger than its companion, and very ingeniously presented on its surface two houses peeping in at the sides, a hill, a wood, a stream, a bridge, and a distant plain; so that from the general indistinctness of the whole, the eye of the spectator might single out a particular feature, and, agreeably to the locality of the scene that was passing, imagine himself in a street, a wood, by a stream, etc., alternately.'

Most of the provincial companies could only exist by dint of serving all the principal towns of their county or district; but there were also companies with no headquarters, who were itinerants pure and simple. These were usually constituted on what was called the 'sharing system.' What this was will be best understood from a concrete instance. Stanton's company, when Harriot Mellon joined it in 1789, consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Stanton, eight actors, four actresses, and an orchestra of two, the 'leader' of which received a fixed salary of a guinea a week, and took no share of the profits. A performance three times a week in a theatre holding £8 nightly would give them £24. Allowing £7 for expenses (including the guinea to the leader of the orchestra), there would be a profit of £17. From this the manager would take £4 for the use of scenery, dresses, etc., leaving £13 to be divided amongst thirteen performers (including the manager who took his share of this as being a performer also), so that, in this case, every player, male or female, would receive £1 for the week's work. They also shared amongst them whatever was unconsumed of the candles used for lighting the theatre. Poor houses, of course, meant less money for everybody. Everard relates in his *Memoirs* that he once heard King remark, in the green-room of Drury Lane, that in his early days, after performing King Richard one night for a sharing company, he

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also gave two comic songs, played in an interlude, danced a horn-pipe, spoke a prologue, and acted harlequin; after all which fatigue he found that his share of the profits was threepence and two pieces of candle! John Bernard made his *début* in a theatre fitted up in a malt-house, and by the aid of a number of club friends who came to support him on the occasion, the receipts on this first night amounted to 'the unprecedented sum' of £9. The manager, he says, was in ecstasies; but when on the second night that ecstatic gentleman followed him to his lodgings to present him with his share of the profits, he found they amounted to no more than eight shillings and three tallow candles. The usual plan was to share the profits at the end of their run in a place, whether that were a day or two or a week or two. In the meantime, the members of the company lived on credit, and they paid their landlords, butchers, bakers, etc., before moving on to another pitch. Bernard gives us a sketch of the well-known strolling manager, Penchard, and his company as they appeared on the march out of Brentwood:—

'First came Mr. Singer and Mrs. Penchard, arm-in-arm; then Old Joe, the stage-keeper, leading a neddy . . . which supported two panniers containing the scenery and wardrobes; and above them, with a leg resting on each, Mr. Penchard himself, dressed in his "Ranger" suit of brown and gold, with his distinguishing wig, and a little three-cornered hat cocked on one side, giving the septuagenarian an air of gaiety that suited well with his known attachment for the rakes and lovers of the drama: one hand was knuckled in his side (his favourite position), and the other raised a pinch of snuff to his nose; and as he passed along he nodded and bowed to all about him, and seemed greatly pleased with the attention he excited.'

It was not all itinerant managers, however, who were wealthy enough to possess their own donkey; and when there had been a bad run, and funds were short, the whole company had to walk to their next stopping-place, carrying

wardrobe and scenery in bundles on their backs. The itinerant companies of Ireland appear to have been worse off than those of England, if we may judge of them from the very Hogarthian picture drawn by 'Petronius Arbiter' in his memoir of Elizabeth Farren. He says:—

'The author of these *Memoirs* has seen the part of the Widow Brady (a breeches part) in the farce of *The Irish Widow*, played in high-heeled shoes, a shift, and a loose greatcoat, the poverty of the wardrobe not affording better accommodation. He remembers also to have seen the part of Captain Plume, in *The Recruiting Officer*, enacted in a red stuff coat, and a laced waistcoat, and yellow plush breeches, borrowed from the footman of the parish Rector. And being once behind the scenes of a theatre erected in a barn, and observing a gentleman decked in a very gaudy suit, without any stockings, he inquired whether the part he was going to perform required his legs to be naked; and was informed that the gentleman's wife was then on, using the stockings, and that as he did not appear at the same time with her . . . he was waiting till she took them off in order to his putting them on.'

It was, of course, inevitable that their material surroundings, as well as the estimation in which, as men and women, they were popularly held, should react powerfully on the characters of the players. The standard of morality, even amongst persons of quality, in the eighteenth century was deplorably low. And, without admitting that there is anything in the actor's art necessarily degrading to his self-respect and relaxing to his moral fibre, it is certainly not much to be wondered at if, with such an environment as has been here outlined, the actors and actresses of the Georgian period were somewhat more prone to imitate the follies and vices rather than the virtues, both of the imaginary persons whom they were in the habit of representing, and of the real persons with whom they became familiar behind the scenes. Tate Wilkinson, in his entertaining *Memoirs*, gives us a delightful instance of the kind of moral advice which was to

be expected from a typical actress's mamma. A young lady named Kitty was married to a man named Burden, who was none too kind to her. Whenever Burden gave offence, Kitty's mamma, a curious character, with a temper that blew in gusts from every point of the compass, and with what Tate calls 'the finest slip-slop collection of words imaginable,' would advise the girl to leave her husband and take up with somebody else, in a harangue to the following effect:—

"Ma'am, you have married a feller beneath you. You played Lucy last night in the *Minor* better than Mrs. Cibber could, upon my soul; and yet this scoundrel would hurt such a divine cretur!"—"True, mamma," replied her daughter, "but suppose he should in rage and despair cut his throat?"—"Cut his throat! let him cut his throat and go to the Devil! but he won't cut his throat; no such good luck. But I'll tell you what, ma'am, if you contradict me, I'll fell you at my feet, and trample over your corse, ma'am. Your father, on his death-bed, told me you was a limb. You are pure as ermind (except with Sir Francis Dolvol), and you shan't live with your husband, ma'am; you have no business to live with your husband. The first women of quality, ma'am, don't live with their husbands, ma'am. Does Mrs. Elmy live with her husband? No, ma'am. Does Mrs. Clive live with her husband? No, ma'am. Does Mrs. Cibber live with her husband? No, ma'am. So now, ma'am, you see the best women of fashion upon earth don't live with their husbands, ma'am."

It must be sorrowfully admitted that the lives of great actresses—at any rate, of actresses of the Georgian period—do not remind us of any such edifying resolves as Longfellow tells us the lives of all great men do. Some of the ladies here presented wrote Apologies for their own lives; and it may perhaps be expected that I should perform a similar office for several of the remainder. But I have preferred to represent them as they were, and leave the reader to do his own moralising wherever necessary.

LAVINIA FENTON (DUCHESS OF BOLTON)

THE eighteenth century produced few instances of so signal a change of fortune as befell Lavinia Fenton, the 'nobody's child,' bred up in a London coffee-house, who attained to the highest rank in the English peerage. Though on the stage for no more than two years, her success as the heroine of the most popular play of the century was so extraordinary that no actress, either before or since, has ever been so much 'the rage.' And after her retirement, at twenty years of age, she appears to have shown herself a woman of so much good sense, good taste, and lively wit, that one cannot but regret the extreme meagreness of the particulars that have come down to us of her life and character.

In 1728, apparently just before she abandoned the stage, there appeared a little catch-penny volume of forty-eight pages, which purported to give her biography up-to-date. It is doubtless a mixture of fact and fiction, which nobody could now disentangle; but some of its statements have been corroborated; and the rest of the narrative is perhaps not much more inaccurate than many of the notices of living celebrities which are weekly served up in our modern society journals. Its title-page, which is a curiosity worth quoting in its entirety, runs as follows:—

THE LIFE OF LAVINIA BESWICK,

alias FENTON, *alias* POLLY PEACHUM:

containing

Her Birth and Education. Her Intrigues at a Boarding School. Her first Acquaintance with a certain *Portuguese* Nobleman. The

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Time when, and Person to whom, she bestow'd her first Favours. A Particular Account of her Conversation with a Mercer, now living near the *Royal Exchange*. Of the Portuguese Nobleman being confin'd in the *Fleet*, and the honourable Method she took to gain him his Liberty. A Copy of Verses which she composed on a *Fop*, which conducted to her Acquaintance with *Mr. Huddy*, for whose Benefit, at the new Theatre in the Hay-Market she first appear'd on the Stage. A Particular Account of a Benefit she shar'd with one Mr. Gilbert, a few Weeks after *Mr. Huddy's* at the same Theatre. Her first Admittance into the Theatre Royal in Lincoln's Inn Fields: her Weekly Salary, both now and then; and the Time when, and the Cause why, it was rais'd. Of her Wit gaining her more Lovers than her Beauty. The Horse-Courser dismounted, yet saves his Distance. A Poet strutting under the Protection of the Nine Muses. Another Poet, who would attack *Ulysses* and *Penelope* in a barbarous Manner is severely handled by Polly in a Satyrical Stanza. Her Judgment in Poetry and History-Painting. And the reasonable Reason why so many great Men have become her Humble Servants.

The Whole interspers'd with convincing Proofs of her *Ingenuity*, Wit, and *Smart Repartees*.

And concluding with some remarkable Instances of her *Humanity* to the *Distressed*.'

Like the placards of some of our evening newspapers, this inviting title-page promises the purchaser rather more for his money than he actually gets. And it cannot be admitted that Lavinia Fenton's anonymous biographer has altogether achieved his ambition of adding, if possible, 'a further lustre to the great name she has already acquired.'

The lady, it appears, was born in London in 1708, and was the fruit of an amour between her mother and a certain lieutenant in the Navy, named Beswick. The father was called away to sea before the birth of the child; and as he had left instructions that if it proved to be a girl she should be named Lavinia, that was accordingly done. But as he did not return, or even report himself, the mother, while Lavinia was still an infant, married one Fenton, a resident

in the Old Bailey; and soon after their marriage this couple set up a coffee-house near Charing Cross. London coffee-houses in those days, it must be remembered, were the representatives of the modern club, and were frequented by all sorts and conditions of men who either desired conversation or were in search of news. Young Lavinia (who took her step-father's name of Fenton) appears to have been a child of precocious and lively spirit; for even at the age of seven or eight she was a favourite plaything of the fops who frequented her mother's house: and later on, when she exhibited 'some singular turns of wit,' as well as some faculty for singing such little catches as she had picked up from the 'humming beaux' who were always about the place, much notice was taken of her by a certain comedian belonging to 'the Old House,' who took great delight in hearing her sing these ditties, and taught her some more. After a time she was sent to a boarding-school; where she remained up to the age of thirteen only; but her step-father must have had some notion of her artistic faculty, for he is reported to have had her instructed in singing by the best masters he could afford. According to the anonymous biographer already mentioned, and to certain broad-sheets and pamphlets issued after she had become celebrated, Lavinia had a number of amorous adventures before there was any thought of her going on the stage. While still a school-girl she is said to have not only attracted the attentions of a student of the Inner Temple, but to have fallen desperately in love with him herself; so that it was a great disappointment to her when this young man, having made inquiries and discovered his inamorata to be the daughter of a coffee-house keeper, incontinently disappeared. We are also told that before she was seventeen her mother made a bargain to surrender her to 'a certain ludicrous knight known as the Feathered Gull,' for £200 down, and

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£200 per annum as long as she remained constant to him. But while the mother was thus seeking to make a bargain for her own profit, Lavinia was quietly looking out for herself; and one Friday in 1725, a coach which had waited for the purpose several hours in the Old Bailey (whither her parents had returned, presumably to another coffee-house), carried the young woman off to the house of a certain Portuguese nobleman, whose name does not appear. After keeping her a very short time, this gentleman brought her home to her mother, and promised to make a suitable provision for her. But it was a promise which he found it easier to make than to perform, for, having outrun the constable, before long he found himself lodged in the Fleet. Lavinia visited him while there in order to condole with him; but he told her he should be liberated as soon as remittances could reach him from his own country, and in the meantime he wished her to continue enjoying herself about town, without troubling in any way about his misfortunes. Lavinia, however, immediately went off and sold all her jewellery (most of which had been given her by him), and with the money so obtained at once effected his release. He then found it convenient to return for a time to Portugal; whence he sent her a present of £400. A ballad about her, printed in 1728, asserts that—

‘Men of high degree
Are as fond of thee
As the German Count thy Keeper,’

and specifies, amongst others, ‘old Sir R—— F——, Lord J——y, and Sir J—— H——,’ whoever they may have been. But it is only fair to state that not only is there no corroboration of these stories (which are of the kind that were frequently made on very slight foundation, and sometimes even without any foundation whatever, in those days), but that other contemporaries assure us there was nothing irregular in

her earlier life; while, after her appearance on the stage, she obtained much credit by rejecting the kind of offers which a beautiful young woman in her situation would be sure to receive in abundance, and, until the Duke of Bolton paid his addresses to her, remained deaf to all amorous proposals.

Her introduction to the stage was brought about by a Mr. Huddy (afterwards manager of a strolling company), who, being turned out of the playhouse in Lincoln's Inn Fields in February 1726, had the consolation of a benefit offered him, about a month later, at the new theatre in the Haymarket. Presumably Mr. Huddy had been one of the frequenters of her mother's coffee-house, and had given her some tuition; but, however that may be, he selected her to play the part of Monimia in Otway's *Orphan* on the occasion of this benefit of his; and, we are told, 'though it was her first time, she gained such applause that she had several presents made her, and some *billets*.' One of Charles Macklin's biographers informs us that—

'she was soon considered a rising actress, and obtained from the town a very considerable share of applause, accompanied with several valuable presents, which was the mode of conferring favours on the performers of those days, without any impeachment of the latter's character, either for meanness, infidelity, etc. They were considered as pledges of public esteem, and as such shown by the performers to their friends and acquaintances.'

Of the *billets* which she received her biographer favours us with a specimen in the following letter from a young ensign, which we are assured is accurately transcribed from the original:—

'Madam, You may be a Person of Honour for ought I know to the contrary, and I hope you will be so honourable as not to let a Man of Honour die dishonourably at your Feet; for by Heavens! though I thought nothing so bright as my Sword, yet I find your

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Eyes are much brighter. My Dear, Dear guardian Angel, could you conceive the Anxiety I suffer on your Account you would surely pity me; for there's never an Officer in our Regiment but takes notice of my being changed (since I saw you upon the Stage), from the most lively, brisk, fashionable, mannerly, genteel Beau in the whole Army, to the most dull, insipid, slovenly, out-o'-th'-way temper'd Dunce in Christendom. Damn me, Madam, if I am not so overcharg'd with Love that my Heart, which is the Bullet in the Barrel of my Body, will certainly burst and blow me into Atoms if I have not your Help to discharge the Burthen; and then, Blood! Madam! I am guilty of so many Blunders and Mistakes in the Execution of my Office that I am become a Laughing-stock to the whole Army. Yesterday I put my Sword on the wrong Side; and this Morning I came into the Park with one of my Stockings the Inside outward; and instead of applying myself to the Colonel in the usual Terms of *Most noble Sir!* I look'd pale, and with an affected damn'd Cringe, call'd him *Madam*. Thus, Madam, you see how far I am gone already. Then to Keep me from Bedlam, take me to your Arms, when I will lay down my Arms, and be your Slave and Vassal.'

Five weeks after Huddy's benefit, she shared a benefit with 'one Mr. Gilbert,' when she acted the part of Cherry Boniface in Farquhar's *Beaux' Stratagem* in so winning a manner as to gain her the favour of certain noblemen, who used their influence to get her into a company of young comedians that acted twice a week during the summer season at the playhouse in Lincoln's Inn Fields, conducting their operations apparently on 'the sharing system.' Here she gained so much applause that Rich was induced to include her in his company for the ensuing winter, at a salary of fifteen shillings a week. She gained new admirers every time she appeared on the stage, says her anonymous biographer, and persons of the highest rank and quality made love to her, insomuch that by the presents she received she was able to live in ease and plenty, and 'appear abroad in as much magnificence as a lady.' All these presents, it is to be understood, were of the legitimate kind

already mentioned; and although she had plenty of offers of another kind, her conduct remained conspicuously discreet. Amongst others, says the biographer of Macklin already quoted, a young libertine of very high rank fell so desperately in love with her, that he offered to relinquish all the pleasures of the town, in which he took so distinguished a lead, and retire with her into the country, upon any terms, short of marriage, she would propose. And by her disdainful rejection of this offer, which was well known, she considerably added to her good reputation. Probably this gentleman was the fop mentioned by her biographer, who wished to take her to a little village on his estate near Richmond, in Yorkshire, and to whom she addressed the following verses:—

‘ Vain Fop, to court me to a rural life,
 Let him reserve that Usage for a Wife.
 A Mistress, sure, may claim more Liberty,
 Unbound by Nature, and by Law she’s free.
 Monster! thy country Cottage I disdain,
 In London let me live, and let me reign;
 The seat of Pleasure, where we, unconfin’d,
 Delight the Body, and improve the Mind.
 To Park we range, where Youth and Beauty shines,
 There we intrigue, and manage brave Designs.
 Give me a Play, a Ball, a Masquerade,
 And let who will enjoy your lonesome Shade, }
 Lavinia for more noble Ends was made.’

If not quite up to the mark of her model, the ‘little great man’ of Twickenham, these verses are passable enough as the composition of a young woman, the daughter of a coffee-house-keeper, who had left school at thirteen years of age. She had so much wit, we are told, and was so well acquainted with men and things, that her company was much sought after; and only men of honour, as well as sense and generosity, were ‘admitted to be of her cabinet council.’ But the few specimens which are given of her ‘merry sayings and

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smart returns of gallantry 'scarcely bear out her biographer's eulogium. She was once in company with a fine gentleman and a fop, we are told, who each in turn addressed her, and each in turn received such very ingenious and suitable answers that the fop was confounded, and the fine gentleman so enchanted with her wit and good sense, that he became from that time forth her slave and vassal.

"Madam," said the Fop, "you have a very fine hand, which adds a great grace to your person."—"Sir," said Polly, "you have a very fine snuff-box, which adds a singular grace to yours." "Madam," said he, "be pleased to take a pinch out of it" (at the same time presenting it with a ridiculous affected air)—"my snuff is very good for the brain."—"Sir," said she, "I frequently observe where the brain is defective, snuff is of great use, and though it cannot properly be called either a restorative or a provocative, yet certainly it is a good preparative to expel dulness." "You are very witty and satirical, Madam," said he.—"Sir," said she, "if your snuff would inspire me with wit, I would satirise upon your box."

This was the 'smart return' which confounded the fop: the wit which enslaved the fine gentleman is not more brilliant; but, as a knavish jest sleeps in a foolish ear, perhaps the want of point may be set down to the dulness of the reporter.

In January 1728 Miss Fenton appeared as Polly Peachum in *The Beggar's Opera*, the first musical play of its kind, which, after having been rejected by Cibber and his brother patentees at Drury Lane, had been accepted by Rich for the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. *The Beggars' Opera* had been written partly in ridicule of the Italian Opera, which at that time appeared to be ousting the legitimate drama from its place, and partly as a satire on the Court, the Government, and the state of society in general. The idea of it seems to have originated with Swift, who one day remarked to Gay what an odd, pretty sort of a thing a New-

gate Pastoral might make. But when Gay, acting on this hint, treated the subject as an opera, neither Swift nor Pope liked it very much; and although the latter contributed some songs satirising the Court and the ministers, both he and Swift had great doubts of its success. Spence reports Pope as saying :

‘We were all at the first night of it, in great uncertainty of the event; till we were very much encouraged by overhearing the Duke of Argyll, who sat in the next box to us, say, “It will do—it must do! I see it in the eyes of them.” This was a good while before the first act was over, and so gave us ease soon; for that Duke (besides his own good taste), has a particular knack as any one now living in discovering the taste of the public. He was quite right in this, as usual; the good nature of the audience appeared stronger and stronger every act, and ended in a clamour of applause.’

Pope’s remark, as reported, leaves us in doubt whether he meant to imply that the Duke’s good taste approved the play, or whether he only perceived that it would suit the bad taste of the public. As a matter of fact, it is a drama of the most squalid and shocking depravity. The hero, Macheath, is captain of a gang of highwaymen; and the other principal characters are Polly Peachum and Lucy Lockit, two out of the numerous girls he has deceived, each of whom believes herself to be his wife; Peachum, a thief-taker, who is also a receiver of stolen goods; Lockit, a brutal and rapacious jailor; the rest being highwaymen, pick-pockets, and dissolute women of the town. The piece is full of the sordid details of the lives of thieves, both in and out of Newgate; and the sentiments expressed are what might be expected of such characters. The satire consists in the perpetual comparison of these scoundrels to ministers and courtiers, and the implication that their manners and sentiments are the manners and sentiments of high society. As the author himself says, such a similitude

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is shown between the manners of high and low life throughout the whole play, that it is difficult to determine whether in their fashionable vices the fine gentlemen imitate the gentlemen of the road, or the gentlemen of the road the fine gentlemen. Peachum is like a great minister in being the director of a gang of thieves, in playing a double game and taking money with both hands, in getting his friends caught and hanged to save his own neck on occasion, in using parliamentary language to disguise acts of scoundrelism, and in his eloquent indignation whenever there is the slightest reflection on his 'honour.' Some of the political allusions pointed strongly to Sir Robert Walpole; and in the scene wherein Peachum and Lockit are represented as squaring up the accounts of their illicit gains, when the latter sang—

‘ When you censure the age,
Be cautious and sage,
Lest the courtiers offended should be ;
If you mention vice or bribe,
’Tis so pat to all the tribe,
Each cries—*That was levelled at me,*

the whole audience instinctively turned their eyes on the stage-box where the minister was sitting, and then loudly encored the song. The opening song of the piece, in which Peachum declares that—

‘ —the statesman, because he’s so great,
Thinks *his* trade as honest as mine,’

was generally thought to be pointed at Walpole; and when, in the course of the second act, Peachum and Lockit quarrelled and took one another by the throat, the scene was so well understood to allude to a recent notorious quarrel between the Prime Minister and Lord Townshend, that the house was convulsed with laughter. The piece had a run such as had not been hitherto known in the

history of the stage, and its success was so extraordinary that as a wit remarked, it made Gay *rich* and Rich *gay*. We are told in one of the notes to the *Dunciad* that—

‘Besides being acted in London sixty-three days without interruption, and renewed the next season with equal applause, it spread into all the great towns of England; was played in many places to the thirtieth and fortieth time, at Bath and Bristol fifty, etc. It made its progress into Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, where it was performed thirty-four days successively. The ladies carried about with them the favourite songs of it in fans, and houses were furnished with it in screens. . . . Furthermore, it drove out of England (for that season) the Italian Opera, which had carried all before it for ten years.’

And, as the same writer informs us, the fame of it was not confined to the author only; for ‘the person who acted Polly, till then obscure, became all at once the favourite of the town; her pictures were engraved and sold in great numbers; her life written, books of letters and verses to her published, and pamphlets made even of her sayings and jests.’ Unfortunately none of these various publications are of the slightest use biographically. A *New Ballad inscribed* [sic] to *Polly Peachum* is merely a piece of obscene doggerel. *Letters in Prose and Verse to the Celebrated Polly Peachum, From the most eminent of her Admirers and Rivals*, is only a collection of dull and ill-written imaginary letters from ‘Philander Flush-Cheek,’ the mercer, ‘Sullivan Slaver,’ of the Inner Temple, ‘Sir Frightfool Frizzle,’ and other professed admirers, who perhaps were recognisable enough in 1728. And the book entitled *Polly Peachum’s Jest*s does not pretend to contain any *bon mots* of her own, but to be a mere Joe Miller collection, which was named after, and dedicated to, her on account of her extraordinary vogue. As the compiler says in his dedicatory epistle—

‘ Whilst Peers, enamour’d with thy low degree,
 Slight the brocaded Fair, to sigh for Thee ;
 Accept this modest Tribute, nor disclaim
 A Work that asks the Sanction of thy Name ;
 Secure (do You its Patroness but shine)
 Of ev’ry one’s Applause, in having Thine.’

Hogarth painted a picture of one of the principal scenes (which happens, by the way, to be the only representation extant of the interior of the Old Theatre in Lincoln’s Inn Fields), wherein we may see the Duke of Bolton and other admirers of Miss Fenton in the side boxes; Gay, the poet, and Rich, the manager, in the background; and on the stage, Walker as Macheath, Hall as Lookit, Hipposley as Peachum, Clark as Filch, Mrs. Eggleton as Lucy, and Miss Fenton as Polly.

A great share of the enormous success of *The Beggar’s Opera* was due to Miss Fenton’s representation of Polly Peachum; and it is said that her rather absurd song—

‘ Oh ponder well ! be not severe ;
 To save a wretched wife ;
 For on the rope that hangs my dear
 Depends poor Polly’s life,’

was sung in so tender and affecting a manner that it always brought down the house; and on the first night did more than anything else to secure the success of the piece. Gay wrote to Swift in March 1728, saying that after the thirty-sixth representation of his play, the theatre was as full as ever, and that he had made between seven and eight hundred pounds out of it, while manager Rich had cleared nearly four thousand. And he added—‘ There is a mezzotinto print published to-day of Polly, the heroine of *The Beggar’s Opera*, who was before unknown, and is now in so high vogue that I am in doubt whether her fame does not surpass that of the opera itself.’ She became the most celebrated toast in town; and so many were her admirers

that, for fear she should be run away with, she was guarded home from the theatre every night by a party of confidential friends. Even manager Rich recognised that Miss Fenton had something to do with the success of his astonishingly profitable venture; and he munificently raised her salary from fifteen shillings to — thirty shillings a week! A theatrical historian, writing at the beginning of the nineteenth century, noted it as a highly curious fact, indicative of a great change in the condition of public performers, that whereas in the year 1728 the best theatrical singer of her day could obtain no more than thirty shillings a week (which, according to the number of playing weeks in the season, would amount to only £45 a year), a first-rate operatic performer in the year 1801 was thought worthy of an arbitration between two rival managers contending who should have her at the rate of £3000 the season and a clear benefit. As he apparently thought the vast increase in remuneration could only be accounted for by ‘the superior folly and dissipation of the later time,’ one wonders what he would have said could his days have been prolonged to the beginning of the twentieth century! We may presume, however, that Miss Fenton was thinking of other things than her increase of salary; for on the 6th of July, 1728, we find Gay writing to Swift: ‘The Duke of Bolton, I hear, has run away with Polly Peachum, having settled £400 a year upon her during pleasure; and upon disagreement £200 a year.’ Whether these were the exact terms of their agreement has never been known for certain; but there is no doubt about the fact that, after one season as Polly in *The Beggar’s Opera*, Lavinia Fenton quitted the stage and became the mistress of the Duke of Bolton. His Grace had a wife living, whom he had been forced by his father to marry in 1713; but on his father’s death the newly-fledged Duke had promptly parted from his Duchess by whom he had

no children; and he had been separated from her for six years when he took Miss Fenton under his protection. The first Duchess died in September 1751, when the Duke almost immediately married the mistress with whom he had then lived, apparently in great harmony, for twenty-three years. She had three children by him while she was his mistress, but none after she had become his wife. Both as mistress and as wife, we are told, her conduct was such as to attract neither envy nor reproach—‘if we except the crime of attaching herself to a married man.’ Dr. Warton, in one of his notes to Swift’s correspondence, tells us that—

‘she was very accomplished; was a most agreeable companion; had much wit, and strong sense, and a just taste in polite literature. Her person was agreeable and well made: though she could not be called a beauty. I have had the pleasure of being at table with her when her conversation was much admired by the first characters of the age, particularly old Lord Bathurst and Lord Granville.’

Three years after their marriage the Duke died. The title, of course, went to his brother, but he bequeathed all his estate, real and personal, to his ‘dear and well-beloved wife,’ who was sole executrix, and the only person mentioned in his will. She survived him six years, dying at the age of fifty-two, on the 24th of January 1760, at West Combe Park, Greenwich, and being buried in the old church of St. Alphege there, ‘with all appropriate honours.’ A few days later, Horace Walpole wrote to his old friend Sir Horace Mann:—

‘The famous Polly, Duchess of Bolton, is dead, having, after a life of merit, relapsed into her Pollyhood. Two years ago, ill at Tunbridge, she picked up an Irish surgeon. When she was dying, this fellow sent for a lawyer to make her will, but the man, finding who was to be her heir, instead of her children, refused to draw it. The Court of Chancery did furnish one other, not quite so scrupu-

lous, and her three sons have but a thousand pounds apiece, the surgeon about nine thousand.'

Horace Walpole sometimes had a spiteful touch; and in this case he may not have been altogether fair to the lady. For aught he knew, or we know, there may have been good and sufficient reasons for her disposition of her property; and, at any rate, her sons had been amply provided for, by a settlement made in the lifetime of their father. There was doubtless something for the rigid moralist to condemn in her conduct, but if we take into consideration the low standard of manners and morals which prevailed in the earlier half of the eighteenth century, above which a poor player girl could hardly be expected to erect herself, we may perhaps admit the plea of the anonymous scribbler who wrote of her before she had become a Duchess—'I think she may pass for an accomplished worthy lady, if the public will allow an actress the title.'

CHARLOTTE CHARKE

COLLEY CIBBER, poet - laureate, popular actor, sparkling dramatist, successful manager, and — by virtue of his *Apology* for his own life (which needed none)—author of the most entertaining book in all theatrical literature, was the father of twelve children; two of whom have earned for themselves conspicuous niches in the temple of ill-fame. With his scoundrelly son, Theophilus, we have here no concern. But it may be worth while to tell anew as far as possible in her own picturesque, though highly ungrammatical phraseology, the story of his youngest daughter, Charlotte; who inherited some measure of her father's literary faculty, and favoured the world, in 1755, with a narrative of her singular career, in which a very eccentric character is revealed in one of the queerest bits of autobiography extant.

The year of Charlotte's birth is not known. According to *The Georgian Era*, she was born about 1715; but that date is at least five years too late to fit in with known facts. Russell in his *Representative Actors* (on what authority does not appear), gives the date of her birth as 1710; and, as she was married in 1729, this is probably much nearer the mark. All she tells us herself is that she was the youngest of Colley Cibber's children; and that, although she was born when her mother was forty-five years of age, and when that lady naturally considered that she had already 'fully answered the end of her creation,' yet, notwithstanding the jealousy of the elder children, she was not regarded as

an unwelcome addition to the family by her parents, who both treated her with peculiar fondness. Her education, she declares, was not merely a genteel, but a liberal one; such, indeed, as might have been sufficient for a son instead of a daughter. But, she adds, 'I was never made much acquainted with that necessary utensil which forms the housewifery part of a young lady's education, called a needle, which I handle with the same clumsy awkwardness a monkey does a kitten'; and we are asked to attribute to the unusual nature of her early studies a turn of mind very different from what might have been expected had her time been occupied, as that of other young ladies mainly was, with stitching beasts, birds, and the letters of the alphabet, on to a bit of canvas. The oddity of her character showed itself at a very early age; and we are informed that the recital of all the strange mad pranks she played as a child would fill a quarto. The earliest of these escapades, which occurred in her fourth year, when staying at a house which her father had taken for the summer at Twickenham, may perhaps be thought a sufficient specimen. Possessed with the idea that, if suitably attired, she would make a very good representation of her father, she got up early one morning, crept down into the servants' hall before any one was stirring, pinned up her dimity coat as well as she could to represent a pair of breeches, donned one of her brother's waistcoats and an enormous tie-wig of her father's, took one of his large beaver hats, heavily laden with lace, as well as a silver-hilted sword and its belt, and thus accoutred, quietly stole out into the garden and rolled herself into a dry ditch, as deep as she was high, which divided the garden from the public road. Up and down this ditch she then walked, bowing gravely to everybody who passed by; and before long, of course, attracting a crowd of wondering people, whose laughter at her grotesque appearance she took

for admiring applause. This performance lasted till breakfast time, when the young mountebank was discovered and carried indoors, much to her own disappointment, and doubtless also to that of the good people of Twickenham, who must have been greatly amused at this first public appearance of the daughter of the patentee of Drury Lane. When eight years of age she was sent to 'a famous school' in Park Street, Westminster, where M. Flahaut, an excellent master of languages, taught her not only French, but also Italian and Latin.

'Nor was my tutor satisfied with these branches of learning alone, for he got leave to instruct me in Geography, which, by the by, though I know it to be a most useful and pleasing science, I cannot think it was altogether necessary for a female; but I was delighted at being thought a learned person.'

She was accordingly furnished with proper books for the study of this useful and pleasing science, as well as with two globes, celestial and terrestrial, which were borrowed of her mother's brother, John Shore, Esq., the serjeant-trumpeter of England, of whom she seems to have opined, as Festus did of the Apostle Paul, that much study had made him mad. And her own vast application to the same abstruse studies, we are informed, would probably have 'distracted' her likewise, had not the judicious M. Flahaut perceived the danger and abridged her tasks. After two years of this 'famous' school, she was allowed to have masters at home to finish her education, M. Flahaut continuing the languages and other severer studies, while Mr. Young, late organist of St. Clement Danes, instructed her in music, and the celebrated Mr. Grosconet in dancing. When it was thought that she had acquired sufficient proficiency in learning and elegant accomplishments, she was sent down to Hillingdon, near Uxbridge, where a house had

been taken for her mother, who suffered from asthma, and was obliged to live much in the country. But the young lady found country life in the winter time a rather dull business, until she had persuaded her mother to let her go out shooting, a pastime which she found extremely attractive, and in which she became a great proficient, spending several days a week at it from early morn till dusk, and usually coming home 'laden with feathered spoil.' But after a short period of enjoyment, some strait-laced, old-fashioned friend of her mother's represented this occupation as so unladylike a proceeding for a girl of fourteen that poor Charlotte was deprived of her gun, and compelled to kill time indoors in various less congenial ways. After this (she half hints, in consequence of this) she had an illness; on her recovery from which her mother sent her to stay with a Dr. Hales of Thorly in Hertfordshire (an eminent physician who was also a relation), with the double object of improving her health, and of getting her made into a good housewife by the instruction and example of the doctor's wife and family. But she admits that she had already imbibed such mistaken, pedantic notions of the superiority of scholarship as to be filled with a stupid contempt for such qualifications as would have made her less troublesome, and a great deal more useful, both to herself and to those about her, than she ever became. At Thorly she had several examples of housewifely perfection before her, but with no good effect.

'Many and vain attempts were used to bring me into their working community; but I had so great a veneration for cattle and husbandry, it was impossible for them, either by threats or tender advice, to bring me into their sober scheme. If anything was amiss in the stable, I was sure to be the first and head of the mob; but if all the fine works in the family had been in the fire, I should not have forsook the curry-comb to have endeavoured to save them from the utmost destruction.'

As Charlotte was indulged with a pony, Dr. Hales would sometimes ask her to call upon one or other of his neighbouring invalids to inquire how they were progressing, and this caused the young woman to fancy herself something of a physician, and to affect a solemnity and gravity of aspect such as she observed in the good doctor. She says that she grew passionately fond of the study of physic, and was never so happy as when the doctor employed her in such little offices as she could be entrusted with without prejudice to the health of his patients. But the tuition in housewifery was a total failure. When, at the end of two years, Mrs. Hales died, and Charlotte was sent back to Hillingdon, she persuaded her mother to let her have a disused room in the house for a dispensary, to which she invited all the old women in the parish to come whenever they were ailing. She learned a few 'physical hard words' from a Latin dictionary, in order to astonish the poor patients, and impress them with a high opinion of her skill in medical science, and she speedily became so popular that the old women of the neighbourhood came to her in crowds. She had procured a stock of drugs from the widow of an apothecary at Uxbridge, who, knowing her family well, had trusted her with 'a cargo of combustibles which was sufficient to have set up a mountebank for a twelvemonth.' Nevertheless this stock was very soon exhausted, for, she says, 'the silly old devils began to fancy themselves ill because they could get physic for nothing,' and before she could obtain a fresh supply the bill of the apothecary's widow came in to her father for payment, and he promptly gave orders that 'Dr. Charlotte' was not to have any further credit. Deprived thus of orthodox drugs she had recourse for a time to herbs.

'One day a poor old woman coming to me with a violent complaint of rheumatic pains and a terrible disorder in her stomach, I

was at a dreadful loss what remedy to apply, and dismissed her with an assurance of sending her something to ease her, by an inward and outward application before she went to bed. It happened that day proved very rainy, which put it into my strange pate to gather up all the snails in the garden, of which, from the heavy shower that had fallen, there was a superabundant quantity. I immediately fell to work, and of some part of them, with coarse brown sugar, made a syrup, a spoonful of which was to be taken once in two hours. Boiling the rest to a consistence, with some green herbs and mutton fat, I made an ointment, and, clapping conceited labels upon the phial and the gallipot, sent my preparation, with a joyous bottle of hartshorn and sal-volatile I purloined from my mother, to add a grace to my prescription.'

As luck would have it the old woman quickly got better, and within three days came again to Charlotte to relate the wondrous effect of her physie, and to beg for a repetition of the prescription. But meanwhile a drought had set in, and as there were no more snails to be found 'Dr. Charlotte' assured the old woman that a too early repetition of the remedy was very unadvisable, as it might thereby lose its effect, and advised her to take no more physie now that her pains were no longer violent, but to keep herself warm and drink no malt liquors. But in the absence of a stock of drugs Charlotte's medical practice became a rather tiresome business, and she soon gave it up. Providence was exceedingly kind to her, she says; for though perhaps she did nobody any positive good, she never had the least misfortune happen to any of the credulous old crones who trusted themselves in her inexperienced hands.

Her next hobby was gardening, in which pleasing and healthful exercise she spent most part of her time every day as long as the fancy lasted. She always thought it proper to imitate the actions and language of those persons whose characters for the time being she might be said to represent. When acting as gardener, after having worked

for two or three hours of a morning, she would have 'a broiled rasher of bacon on a luncheon of bread,' which she ate as she walked about, with a pruning-knife in her other hand; and seeds and plants would be the subjects of her discourse at all hours. When she was groom, she would bring a halter or a horse-cloth into the house, throw it down awkwardly on a chair, shrug her shoulders, scratch her head, call for a glass of small beer to be brought in haste, and remark, 'I haven't a single horse dressed or watered, and here 'tis almost eight o'clock: the poor cattle will think I have forgot 'em,' or something to a similar effect. While her father was in France, the servant, who combined the offices of groom and gardener at Hillingdon, got violently drunk, and so abused, not only his fellow-servants, but his mistress also, that he was promptly dismissed. Charlotte was overjoyed at such a stroke of good luck, for it left her in sole possession of the field; and she went regularly each day 'with that orderly care to my separate employments that is generally the recommendatory virtue, for the first month only, of a new-hired servant.' Mrs. Cibber believed the discharged man to be dishonest; and when traces of his footsteps were said to be found under some of the windows on the night after his dismissal, she became greatly alarmed, and had visions of burglars breaking in and murdering them all in their beds. This was another opportunity for Charlotte, who was ardently ambitious to be known as a woman of masculine courage. She ordered all the plate to be deposited in her bedroom, and told her mother to fear nothing, for she would protect the house from burglars at the hazard of her life.

'I stripped the hall and kitchen of their firearms, which consisted of my own little carbine, which I had, through the old maid's persuasion, been stripped of long before, a heavy blunderbuss, a

musketoon, and two brace of pistols; all of which I had loaded with a couple of bullets each before I went to bed; not with any design, on my word, to yield to my repose, but absolutely kept awake three long and tedious hours, which was from twelve to three, the time I thought most likely for an invasion. But no such thing happened, for not a mortal approached, on which I thought myself undone, till a friendly dog, who barked at the moon, gave a happy signal, and I bounced from my repository, with infinite obligations to the cur, and fired out of the window piece after piece, re-charging as fast as possible, till I had consumed about a pound of powder, and a proportionable quantity of shot and balls. 'Tis not to be supposed but the family was on my first onset in this singular battle . . . soon alarmed. The frequent reports and violent explosions encouraged my kind promptor to this farce to change his lucky bark into an absolute howl, which strongly corroborated with all that had been thought and said in regard to an attempt upon the house. My trembling mother, who lay half expiring with dreadful imaginations, rang her bell, which summons I instantly obeyed, firmly assuring her that all danger was over, for that I heard the villain decamp on the first firing.'

Charlotte says that nothing but her mother's excessive fondness could have induced her to tolerate such unprecedented and ridiculous follies as she was guilty of; for in all other respects Mrs. Cibber showed herself a woman of real good sense. But at length an accident, which might have had fatal results, put an end to this madcap's mischievous freaks. Learning that a fine young horse, fit for a chaise, was for sale at Uxbridge, and having heard her father remark that after his return from France he proposed to add another such horse to his stable, she rushed over to Uxbridge, without the knowledge of her mother, who happened to be lying ill at the time, and desired to have the animal harnessed and put to for her inspection. The owner, who had often seen her driving her father's horses, naturally assumed that she had been duly commissioned, and allowed her to set off with his horse for a trial spin over Uxbridge Common.

But the beast proved to be totally unmanageable, and after dragging her and the chaise up hill and down dale for miles, at last set off at a terrific pace, which it was beyond her power to restrain, for home, knocking down and running over a young child in the course of its mad career. Fortunately the child received no more hurt than a slight graze on the neck; and when a surgeon had certified that this was all the damage done, she was able to satisfy the parents with a shilling and a shoulder of mutton. But some busybody, with more energy than brains, rushed off to Hillingdon and informed Mrs. Cibber that her daughter had killed a child! The shock of hearing such a story, in her weak condition, came near to killing Mrs. Cibber, and Charlotte was thrown into a state of melancholy, which lasted 'as long as could be expected from one of my youth and volatile spirits.'

It was shortly after this date that she made the acquaintance of Mr. Richard Charke, one of the Drury Lane company, 'whose memory,' she observes, 'will, by all lovers of music who have heard his incomparable performance on the violin, be held in great estimation.' Mr. Charke said soft things, and flattered Charlotte into the belief that he was in love with her, though subsequent experience led her to the conclusion that he was actuated solely by pecuniary interest, thinking it would be a fine thing for him to be son-in-law to Mr. Colley Cibber, a patentee in Drury Lane Theatre. But she admits that he was a very fascinating young man, and that she thought it would be a fine thing to be married. Accordingly, after six months' acquaintance, they were married in February 1729, with her father's full consent; and for the moment she thought, not only that the cup of her happiness was full, but that it would last for ever.

'But alas! I soon found myself deceived in that fond conceit; for we were both so young and indiscreet we ought rather to have been sent to school than to church, in regard to any qualifications

on either side towards rendering the marriage state comfortable to one another. To be sure, I thought it gave me an air of more consequence to be called Mrs. Charke than Miss Charlotte, and my spouse, on his part, I believe, thought it a fine feather in his cap to be Mr. Cibber's son-in-law, which indeed it would have proved had he been skilful enough to have managed his cards rightly, as my father was greatly inclined to be his friend, and endeavoured to promote his interest among people of quality and fashion.'

The incontestable merit as a musical performer, which recommended Mr. Charke to Colley Cibber, however, was quite compatible with certain incontestable demerits as a husband which soon became patent to Colley Cibber's daughter; and she had to complain of a succession of discreditable amours. After the birth of a child, matters became worse instead of better, and within a year from their wedding day they privately agreed to live apart.

'When Mr. Charke thought proper, he paid me a visit, and I received him with the same good-natured civility I might an old decayed acquaintance that I was certain came to ask me a favour, which was often the case, for I seldom had the honour of his company but when cash ran low, and I as constantly supplied his wants.'

Charlotte, who had for some time past been preparing for the stage, made her first appearance at Drury Lane, as Mademoiselle in the *Provoked Wife*, early in April 1730,—according to her account, on the occasion of Mrs. Oldfield's last appearance before an audience, but in reality some three weeks before that. The incomparable Oldfield had given her some kindly words of encouragement, and she made her début without any of the embarrassing fear which usually attends a first essay in the face of an audience. Her father had cautiously set her down in the bills as 'a young gentlewoman who had never appeared on any stage before,' in consequence of which indefinite announcement Miss Charlotte deemed it necessary to go the whole round of her

acquaintance in order to inform them who this young gentlewoman was. More by luck than by judgment, she made a fair success in the part; and six weeks later she was chosen to play for the combined benefit of her husband and a promising young actress, Miss Rafter, afterwards the celebrated Mrs. Clive. On this occasion the announcement better suited her vanity.

‘My name was in capitals on this second attempt, and I dare aver that the perusal of it, from one end of the town to the other, for the first week, was my most immediate and constant business: nor do I believe it cost me less, in shoes and coaches, than two or three guineas to gratify the extravagant delight I had, not only in reading the bills, but sometimes hearing myself spoken of, which, luckily, was to my advantage; nor can I answer for the strange effect a contrary report might have wrought on a mind so giddily loaded with conceited transport.’

During the following three years, she played a number of parts at Drury Lane; and after her success as the original Lucy in *George Barnwell*, her salary was raised from twenty to thirty shillings a week. But in 1733, after Colley Cibber's retirement, there was a revolt amongst the players at Drury Lane, and Charlotte, together with her brother Theophilus and several others, seceded to the new theatre in the Haymarket, where she obtained a very good share of parts, and a salary of £3 a week. In March 1734 all the seceders returned to Drury Lane, when Fleetwood assumed the managership. But in 1735, in consequence of a quarrel with Fleetwood, Charlotte took French leave of him, and went back to the Haymarket. What the quarrel was about is not on record; but some meddling busybodies fanned the spark into a blaze, and she printed a farce she had written, entitled *The Art of Management*, wherein Fleetwood was held up to ridicule, and in which she candidly admits that she probably went too far. In spite of this ‘impertinent and

stupid' revenge, however, Fleetwood, at her father's request, restored her to her former position at Drury Lane. But after a very short time she left that theatre once more, this time to join Henry Fielding's company at the Haymarket, where, she says, she received a salary of four guineas a week, and a benefit by which she cleared sixty guineas. She does not mention the fact, but about this time she appears to have produced a play, entitled, *The Carnival, or Harlequin Blunderer*, which was acted at the Lincoln's Inn Theatre in 1735, presumably without any extraordinary success. In 1737 she was acting at the Lincoln's Inn Theatre; but after that date her name disappears from the play-bills, and she started on a series of singular adventures which lasted for the following seven years.

While engaged with Fielding's company at the Haymarket, she lodged with a married sister in Oxenden Street, where, being, as she declares, always treated as though she were a cat or a monkey, she was provided with the worst apartment in the house, which was not even weather-tight, a fact of which she was entirely insensible until a particularly wet and blustering night drew her attention to it in a very uncomfortable way. Why she left the theatre is not stated: we are only informed that she suddenly took it into her head to leave this 'airy mansion' in Oxenden Street, and open a shop as a grocer and oil-woman in Long Acre. For a time great numbers of her acquaintances came to buy of her, out of mere curiosity; but she made a very poor woman of business; and after making a succession of losses through her blundering and general ignorance of trade, in three months time she thought it advisable to close the shop. Then she opened a puppet-show over the Tennis Court in James Street. This show, she declares, was generally allowed to be the most elegant thing of its kind ever exhibited. She bought mezzotintos of eminent persons

from which to have her faces carved, and spared no expense for clothes to make them magnificent, nor for appropriate scenery. Where the money came from is a mystery; but we are informed that the properties of this show cost her several hundred pounds. When she took the grocery shop, it was necessary for her to secure her effects from her husband, who, in the absence of any formal deed of separation, would have been able to step in and take anything she had. But before she opened the puppet-show, Charke appears to have left London for Jamaica, where he shortly after died. 'Peace to his manes!' she exclaims. 'I hope Heaven has forgiven him, as I do from my soul; and wish, for both our sakes, he had been master of more discretion. I had then possibly been possessed of more prudence.' When Charke left England, Mrs. Cibber had been dead about a year, and Charlotte had 'newly' fallen under her father's displeasure, so that she was thrown entirely on her own resources. The puppet-show continued profitable enough for a time, but when she fell ill of a fever it had to be abandoned. After leaving the Tennis Court, she took a house in Marsham Street, Westminster, and lived 'very privately' for a time. But it was necessary to do something for a living, so one fine day she started off with her puppets for Tunbridge Wells, with the notion that there would be a good harvest to be reaped there during the season. But on her arrival she found the field in possession of a man named Lacon, who had entertained the company there very successfully with a similar show for several successive years, and there was therefore nothing for her to do but return to London. The puppets were let out on hire for a time, but not finding that plan to answer her expectations, she sold the whole show (which had cost her £500) for twenty guineas.

Her next adventure was one that she frequently refers to

incidentally, but which, for some reason known only to herself, she always enveloped in mystery.

‘Not long after I had parted from what might really, by good management, have brought me in a very comfortable subsistence, and in a genteel light, I was addressed by a worthy gentleman (being then a widow) and closely pursued till I consented to an honourable though very secret alliance; and, in compliance to the person, bound myself by all the vows sincerest friendship could inspire never to confess who he was. Gratitude was my motive to consent to this conjunction, and extreme foolishness was his inducement to request it. To be short—he soon died; and, unhappily for me . . . I was deprived of every hope and means of support.’

Part of the mystery of her connection with this unnamed person is, that after his death she considered herself bound to go about in male attire. But she had masqueraded in this fashion for a very short time before she was arrested for a debt of seven pounds, when, as she declares, she had not the means of raising so many pence. She endeavoured to get bail; but one of the two persons who were induced to come forward to do her this service was objected to, and there seemed no prospect before her but to end her days in prison. However, after she had spent a night in a sponging-house in Jackson’s Alley, a number of ‘the ladies who kept coffee-houses in and about Covent Garden’ (described by Dibdin as keepers of houses of ill-fame), came to express their sympathy with ‘poor Sir Charles,’ as they styled her; and when Mrs. Hughes had laid down two guineas, and Mrs. Douglas of the Piazza one guinea, the rest all subscribed something, according to their means, and between them scraped together enough to set her at liberty. She then found it convenient to retire into ‘a most dismal mansion’ in Great Queen Street, and never show herself out of doors except on a Sunday, when she sallied forth to solicit help from her friends. Then her daughter fell ill; and her brother Theophilus sent an apothecary to attend the child,

at his own expense, 'for which,' she says, in a burst of what seems rather extravagant gratitude for so small and natural a service, 'I shall ever acknowledge myself extremely his debtor.' Perhaps she handled a child as awkwardly as she confesses to have handled a needle; at any rate, whenever it fell ill, she seems to have behaved like a frantic idiot. One Sunday she left the child at home while she went 'to prog for her and myself by pledging with an acquaintance a beautiful pair of sleeve-buttons'; and on her return, two hours later, she found the infant in convulsions.

'I took her up, and overcome with strong grief, immediately dropped her on the floor, which I wonder did not absolutely end her by the force of the fall. . . . My screaming and her falling raised the house; and in the hurry of my distraction I ran into the street with my shirt-sleeves dangling loose about my hands, my wig standing on end "like quills upon the fretful porcupine," and, proclaiming the sudden death of my much beloved child, a crowd soon gathered round me; and in the violence of my distraction, instead of administering any necessary help, wildly stood among the mob to recount the dreadful disaster.'

Nobody present happened to know her, and the spectacle of a young gentleman exhibiting his grief for the loss of a child in this extravagant fashion caused her to be taken for a lunatic. But out of evil came good; for the scene attracted the notice of her next-door neighbour, Mr. Adam Hallam, who interested himself in her case, and acted the part of a very good Samaritan. He first sent her a letter of condolence, 'in which was enclosed that necessary and never-failing remedy for every evil incidental to mankind in general'; and afterwards not only constantly sent to inquire after the child's progress, but took care that the mother also was well looked after.

'At his own request, his table was my own; and I am certain his good-nature laid an embargo on his person, as he often dined at home in compliment to me, rather than leave me to undergo the

shock of mingling with his servants, or be distinguished by them as his pensioner by leaving me to eat by myself. It happened very *à propos* for me that Mr. Hallam had a back door into his house, which prevented the hazards I might otherwise have been liable to by going into the street; and, indeed, as Sharp says to Gaylers, the back door I always thought the safest, by which means I had a frequent opportunity of conversing with a sincere friend, whose humanity assuaged the anguish of my mind, and whose bounty was compassionately employed for a considerable time to protect me and mine from the insupportable and distracting fears of want.'

Among others who also befriended her, she mentions Delane, the comedian, whose timely contribution was made the more welcome by the politeness with which it was conferred; Mrs. Woffington, whose merits 'must be sounded in a song of grateful praise,' and some more of the generous natives of Ireland, whose virtues, she adds (by way of a preliminary puff to her next book), will be found expatiated upon in the *History of Mr. Dumont*, which 'will be immediately published after the conclusion of this narrative.' She was also, it appears, at one time or another indebted to the bounty of Rich, Garrick, Lacey, and Beard, in addition to that of her sister-in-law, Mrs. Cibber, who often afforded her relief, and once saved her from gaol by a timely present. As soon as her child recovered, she would sometimes leave it and creep out by owl-light 'in search of adventures.' Plays were at that time frequently acted in the Tennis Court, and seeing that almost as frequently something was found wanting among 'the gentry who exhibited at that celebrated slaughter-house of dramatic poetry,' she occasionally got a job there.

'One night I remember *The Recruiting Officer* was to be performed (as they were pleased to call it) for the benefit of a young creature who had never played before. To my unbounded joy, Captain Plume was so very unfortunate that he came at five o'clock to inform the young gentlewoman he did not know a line of his part.

I (who though shut up in the mock green-room) did not dare to tell them I could do it, for fear of being heard to speak, and that the sound of my voice, which is particular, and as well known as my face, should betray me to those assailants of liberty who constantly attend every play-night there, to the inexpressible terror of many a potentate who has quiveringly tremored out the hero lest the sad catastrophe should rather end in a sponging-house than a bowl of poison or a timely dagger. . . . At last the question was put to me. I immediately replied (seeing the coast clear) I could do such a thing ; but, like Mosca, was resolved to stand on terms, and make a merit of necessity. "To be sure, ma'am," says I, "I'd do anything to oblige you ; but I'm quite unprepared ; I have nothing here proper ; I want a pair of white stockings and a clean shirt." [The artful schemer confesses that she had these requisites in her coat-pocket all the time.] . . . Then I urged that 'twould be scarce worth her while to pay me my price : upon which she was immediately jogged by the elbow and took aside to advise her to offer me a crown. I, being pretty well used to the little arts of these worthy wights, received the proposal soon after ; and without making any answer to it, jogged the lady's other elbow and withdrew, assuring her that under a guinea I positively would not undertake it ; that to prevent any demur with the rest of the people she should give me the sixteen shillings privately, and publicly pay me the five. Her house was as full as it would hold, and the audience clamouring for a beginning. At length she was obliged to comply with my demands, and I got ready with the utmost expedition. When the play (which was, in fact, a farce to me) was ended, I thought it mighty proper to stay till the coast was clear, that I might carry off myself and guinea securely ; but in order to effect it I changed clothes with a person of low degree, whose happy rags, and the kind covert of night, secured me from the dangers I might have otherwise encountered. My friend took one road, I another, but met at my lodgings, where I rewarded him, poor as I was, with a shilling, which at that time I thought a competent fortune for a younger child.'

A short time after this, on the invitation of an itinerant manager named Jockey Adams, she joined his company 'at a town within four miles of London,' where, being in no want of clothes notwithstanding her distress, she cut a very genteel

figure as 'Mr. Brown.' A young lady of the neighbourhood, an orphan heiress, with forty thousand pounds in the Bank of England, and twenty thousand more invested in the Indies, fell in love with good-looking, well-bred Mr. Brown; and that young 'gentleman' received a letter inviting him to drink tea with the lady and some of her friends. The confidential maid who brought the invitation took occasion to inform the fascinating 'actor' that if he pleased he might be the happiest man in the kingdom before he was forty-eight hours older; so that Charlotte had time to make up her mind what to say before the interview took place.

'In obedience to the lady's command, I waited on her, and found her with two more, much of her own age, who were her confidants, and entrusted to contrive a method to bring this business to an end by a private marriage. When I went into the room, I made a general bow to all, and was for seating myself nearest the door, but was soon lugged out of my chair by a young mad-cap of fashion, and, to both the lady's confusion and mine, awkwardly seated by her. We were exactly in the condition of Lord Hardy and Lady Charlotte in *The Funeral*; and I sat with as much fear in my countenance as if I had stole her watch from her side. She, on her part, often attempted to speak, but had such a tremor on her voice, she ended only in broken sentences. 'Tis true I have undergone the dreadful apprehensions of a bum-bailiff, but I should have thought one at that time a seasonable relief. . . . The before-mentioned mad-cap, after putting us more out of countenance by bursting into a violent fit of laughing, took the other by the sleeve and withdrew, as she thought, to give me a favourable opportunity of paying my addresses; but she was deceived, for, when we were alone, I was in ten thousand times worse plight than before; and what added to my confusion was seeing the poor soul dissolve into tears, which she endeavoured to conceal.'

With some hesitation and difficulty Charlotte managed at length to inform the love-sick maiden that although she bore the outward semblance of a man, she was in reality a

woman, the daughter of Colley Cibber of Drury Lane Theatre. At first the young lady took this for an ingenious evasion, occasioned by a dislike to her person, and after repeated assurances appeared to be only half convinced of the truth of Charlotte's story; but, true or not true, there was evidently no help for her, and 'Mr. Brown' was permitted to take his leave without further importunity.

Soon after this adventure, Jockey Adams's company moved off in their cart to another place, where Charlotte unwittingly took a lodging in the house of a bailiff. But as soon as she discovered her landlord's horrid calling, visions of arrest assailed her, and she hit upon the artful expedient of going to her manager with the untrue (though likely enough) intelligence that she had heard of a writ being issued against *him*, a piece of information which so alarmed Mr. Jockey that he quietly removed his company and belongings away from the town that same night. Thus it came about that they arrived at their next stopping-place about six o'clock one Sunday morning, and the manager had to tax his ingenuity to find feasible excuses for the unseasonableness both of the hour and the day. However, the landlord of the inn was delighted with the arrival of so large a company, possessed of such a number of weighty boxes (though these, as Charlotte remarks, were chiefly weighted with rusty old swords and other 'properties' of no very valuable character), and for the first week they lived like the imaginary princes and princesses they so often represented. But when they had played for a few nights without getting in any cash worth speaking of, Boniface's countenance fell, and the hungry comedians' inquiry what was for dinner, was answered by an intimation that it would be more convenient if they would provision themselves. Seeing such very poor prospects with this company, Charlotte left Jockey Adams and returned to London, arriving there

with a solitary shilling in her pocket. Within a couple of hours of her arrival she had secured a lodging at a private house in Little Turnstile, Holborn, and within another two hours, having heard that an inquiry had been made after her by an itinerant manager then staying at Dartford, she set out to walk to that town, where she arrived about eight p.m. She played the same evening, for such performances did not begin until nine or ten o'clock; but her walk from London through a heavy rain had made her as hoarse as a raven; and next morning the manager paid her off with half-a-crown. 'An excellent demonstration,' she observes, 'of the humanity of these low-lived creatures, who have no farther regard to the persons they employ, but while they are immediately serving 'em, and look upon players like pack-horses, though they live by 'em.' On her return to London, she was reduced to pledging her clothes for bread, and before she had recovered her voice both she and her child were nearly stripped. She then went on tour with a woman whose husband (the manager of the company) was lying in Newgate under sentence of transportation; and after playing at Gravesend for a month, and at Harwich for three weeks, on the sharing system, which brought them in about a guinea a week each, she was again back in London with nothing to do. No other offer arriving for some time, it occurred to her to pay a round of visits to the charitable (if otherwise disreputable) 'coffee-house' keepers who had subscribed on a former occasion to get her out of the sponging-house; and by going to one at a time, to offer thanks for past favours, and hint at present hardships, she managed to return from each visit with enough provender for a day or two following. When she had exhausted this set of acquaintances, she paid a visit to her brother Theophilus, who clapped a half-crown into her hand, and asked her to dine with him next day to meet a friend of his who might possibly be serviceable to

her. Within three days, through this gentleman's interest, she obtained a situation as valet to Lord A—a, who, having been unable to find a well-bred man who could speak French to serve him in that capacity, consented to try as valet a woman masquerading in man's clothes. For a short time she appears to have lived in clover.

'The day following I entered into my new office, which made me the superior domestic in the family. I had my own table, with a bottle of wine, and any single dish I chose for myself, extra of what came from my Lord's, and a guinea paid me every Wednesday morning, that being the day of the week on which I entered into his lordship's service. At this time my Lord kept in the house with him a *fille de joie*, though no great beauty, yet infinitely agreeable, a native of Ireland, remarkably genteel, and finely shaped, and a sensible woman, whose understanding was embellished by a fund of good nature. When there was any extraordinary company, I had the favour of the lady's company at my table; but when there was no company at all, his lordship permitted me to make a third at his, and very good-naturedly obliged me to throw off the restraint of behaviour incidental to a servant, and assume that of the humble friend and cheerful companion. Many agreeable evenings I passed in this manner, and when bed-time approached I took leave and went home to my own lodgings, attending the next morning at nine, the appointed hour. I marched every day through the streets with ease and security, having his lordship's protection, and proud to cock my hat in the face of the bailiffs, and shake hands with them into the bargain.'

This happy security, however, only lasted five weeks; for two friends,—'supercilious coxcombs,' and 'pragmatical blockheads,' she calls them—persuaded his lordship to discharge her, as keeping a person of her sex in the character of a valet, they said, might endanger his reputation for sanity. When the present with which Lord A—a mitigated her dismissal was exhausted, she lost courage, and fell into such a state of despondency as to contemplate suicide. But suddenly, in the midst of one of her deepest

fits of gloom, the resolution came to her to make another bold stroke for fortune. She took a neat lodging facing Red Lion Square, and dating thence, addressed a letter to Mr. John Beard, asking him for a certain sum of money to enable her to start a new scheme for getting a livelihood.

‘My request was most obligingly complied with by that worthy gentleman, whose bounty enabled me to set forth to Newgate Market and buy a considerable quantity of pork at best hand, which I converted into sausages, and, with my daughter, set out laden with each a burden as weighty as we could well bear, which, not having been used to luggages of that nature, we found extremely troublesome; but *necessitas non habet leges*, we were bound to that, or starve. Thank Heaven! our loads were like *Æsop*’s, when he chose to carry the bread, to the astonishment of his fellow travellers, not considering that his wisdom preferred it because he was sure it would lighten as it went; so did ours, for as I went only where I was known, I soon disposed, among my friends, of my whole cargo.’

She managed to subsist for some time as a ‘higgler’ in this line; but, curiously enough, she waxes highly indignant at the libellous people who spread reports about her dealing in other articles than sausages. The report that she carried a long pole about the streets every day, hawking rabbits, had no other foundation than the fact that somebody happened to see her one day during the period of her service with Lord A—a, carrying a hare to his lordship’s house. Why, when she seems quite proud of having sold sausages, she should repudiate with so much indignation a report that she dealt in fish, is not very intelligible; though she would certainly have had our sympathy if she had once more brought her oaken cudgel into play for the benefit of the ‘wicked forger’ who related that one day her father happened to pass by when she was selling flounders, and that she took the largest of them out of her basket and slapped it full in his face. The sausage business appears to

have come to an end in consequence of an illness she had, for some time after which, aided by an occasional guinea from her former master, Lord A—a, Charlotte and her child were supported by a charitable young woman not much richer than herself. Then she obtained a situation as waiter at the King's Head in Marylebone; but after a short time was obliged to reveal her sex and leave the place because the mistress's sister had fallen in love with her. An occasional turn at the new Wells or at Bartholomew Fair being all that offered after this, she determined to make another attempt in a fresh line of business. She wrote to her mother's brother, John Shore, imploring him, for the sake of his dear departed sister, to furnish her with enough money to open a public-house. Strange to say, Shore at once replied that if she would find a suitable house he would willingly find the money; whereupon, with her usual inconsiderateness, she promptly took the very first one she could find to let, which, unfortunately for her, happened to be a house in Drury Lane which had been 'most irregularly and indecently kept by the last incumbent.' As soon as her uncle gave her the money she asked for, her first proceeding was to pay off her creditors; and it is curious to find that the whole amount due to those who for some years past had kept her in fear of having to pass the remainder of her days in prison did not amount to more than £25. But the public-house turned out no more successfully than any of her other speculations. At the outset she wasted a good deal of her small capital in buying useless furniture, and in giving away ham, beef, or veal to every person who on the opening day called for a quart of beer or a glass of brandy. Then she gave credit to a number of strolling players out of work, who, when they got something to do, forgot to pay her, and were far away out of her reach. And finally she let her upstairs rooms to three

separate sets of scoundrels, who systematically robbed her. Consequently, after a very short tenure of the place, she saw nothing for it but to clear out her furniture, and leave house and lodgers to take care of themselves. In 1743 her farce, *Tit for Tat, or Comedy and Tragedy at War*, was acted at Punch's Theatre, apparently without bringing her much, either in the way of distinction or emolument. In 1744 she went to the Haymarket, where her brother Theophilus had brought out *Romeo and Juliet*. For a short period she lived with him very comfortably; but when he was forced to retire from the theatre by order of the Lord Chamberlain, her attempt to carry on the concern without him ignominiously failed. After that, she took a notion of supporting herself by her pen, but, as she explains, 'my cares increasing I had not time to settle myself properly or collect my mind for such an undertaking,' and was therefore obliged to 'trust to Providence from time to time for what I could get by occasional acting.' Though unfortunate in the main, she informs us, something usually turned up about once in every five or six weeks to cheer her drooping spirits. And it is to be presumed that she did not entirely rely upon the occasional acting, for we hear of the Duke of Montagu, who was 'a universal physician and restorer of peace and comfort to afflicted minds,' sending her a donation of several guineas, in response, presumably, to an application for help. After obtaining an engagement at 'a guinea a day' (!) to work the Punch at Russell's puppet Italian Opera, which speedily came to an end in consequence of poor Russell's arrest for debt and subsequent death, she gained a poor subsistence for a time in London by playing at Bartholomew and May Fairs; and then went into the country for another period of strolling. After travelling about for a year or two with various companies, sometimes half-starved, and once, with the rest of her

companions, clapped into jail as a rogue and a vagabond, she made up her mind to abandon playing altogether. She borrowed some money (how, or of whom, we are not informed), took a handsome house, with a large garden of three-quarters of an acre, at Chepstow, and decided to turn pastrycook. On the first day of business she took twenty shillings; but as soon as the curiosity she had raised was satisfied, trade declined. She then proposed to make a little money by selling the fruit from her garden; but some nefarious rascals quietly picked and carried it all off one night as soon as it was ripe. It therefore became desirable to move on to some other place; and having pitched upon a small harbour town five miles from Bristol, she took a little shop, stuck up a board bearing the legend—‘Brown, Pastry-cook, from London,’ and during the summer months did a fair trade. But in the winter there was no business to be done at all; so she abandoned her shop, took a lodging in Bristol at two shillings a week, wrote a short tale for the Bristol paper, and was engaged by the printer thereof, at a small weekly pittance, to correct the press. Following this came an engagement with Simpson to act as prompter at the Bath theatre; an arduous post, she says, which she endured from September till March, but was then compelled to relinquish from excessive fatigue. During this season at Bath, apparently, she abandoned the male attire which she had worn for so many years, and once more dressed as a woman. All the explanation she offers of this curious freak of hers is as follows:—

‘My being in breeches was alleged to me as a very great error; but the original motive proceeded from a particular cause; and I rather choose to undergo the worst imputation that can be laid on me on that account than unravel the secret, which is an appendix to one I am bound, as I before hinted, by all the vows of truth and honour everlastingly to conceal.’

She incidentally mentions at this part of her narrative that her daughter had imprudently married a strolling player three years previously: and now, after giving up her situation at Bath, she travelled for a short time with the company her daughter belonged to, although her son-in-law treated her 'impertinently,' and she was not otherwise comfortable. Strolling companies, she informs us, were not only filled with barbers' 'prentices, tailors, and footmen out of place, who were all despicable actors, but—

'going a-strolling is engaging in a little dirty kind of war, in which I have been obliged to fight so many battles, I have resolutely determined to throw away my commission: and, to say truth, I am not only sick, but heartily ashamed of it, as I have had nine years' experience of its being a very contemptible life; rendered so through the impudent and ignorant behaviour of those who pursue it; and I think it would be more reputable to earn a groat a day in sinder-sifting at Tottenham Court than to be concerned with them.'

Consequently about Christmas time 1754, she once more made her way to London, and determined henceforth to support herself by her pen. At the time of writing, she has a novel on the stocks (to which she thus gives a puff preliminary); she proposes to have a benefit once a year; and she takes this opportunity to advertise another project which promises to bring further grist to the mill.

'As I am foolishly flattered, from the opinion of others, into a belief of the power of cultivating raw and inexperienced geniuses, I design very shortly to endeavour to instruct those persons who conceive themselves capable of dramatic performances, and propose to make the stage their livelihood.'

In short, she intends to hold classes, on reasonable terms, three times a week, from 10 A.M. to 8 P.M., where ladies and gentlemen may be instructed in the arts of elocution and of acting. Whether she ever opened such an academy, or

whether she ever had an annual benefit, we do not know; but in some way or other she managed to prolong her scarcely enjoyable existence for another five years.

Charlotte appears to have had no intercourse with her father for something like twenty years. In view of her notorious eccentricities, it is not surprising that highly absurd stories about her became current, and that she was reported to have flouted her father on various occasions. But she protests most emphatically that all such stories were malicious lies. The worst of them all was the invention of a beggarly fellow who had been occasionally a supernumerary at Drury Lane Theatre, and who was compelled, she tells us, to apologise on his knees for this piece of wanton cruelty. He related a circumstantial story to the effect that she had hired a fine bay gelding, borrowed a pair of pistols, stopped her father in Epping Forest, presented a pistol at his breast, threatened to blow out his brains if he did not stand and deliver, and then upbraided him for his cruelty in abandoning her to poverty and distress. The story went on to declare that Colley Cibber then wept, asked his daughter's pardon for his ill-usage of her, presented her there and then with his purse containing threescore guineas, and promised to restore her to his family and his love; whereupon the female highwayman thanked him and rode away. A likely story! she exclaims, that her father and his servants would be all so intimidated by a single highwayman, and that a female, and his own daughter into the bargain.

‘However, the story soon reached my ears, which did not more enrage me on my own account than the impudent ridiculous picture the scoundrel had drawn of my father in this horrid scene. The rascal threw me into such an agonising rage, I did not recover it for a month; but the next evening I had the satisfaction of being designedly placed where this villain was to be, and concealed behind a screen, heard the lie re-told from his

own mouth. He had no sooner ended than I rushed from my covert, and, being armed with a thick oaken plant, knocked him down without speaking a word to him; and had I not been happily prevented, should, without the least remorse, have killed him on the spot.'

Charlotte's estrangement from her father was well enough known; and it seems to have been generally thought that her offence must have been of a very heinous character to have permanently alienated the affections of a fond parent, who was noted for his benevolence and humanity. According to her own account, she had been guilty of nothing worse than youthful 'follies' and 'indiscretions' (unspecified, however), of a not unpardonable character; and from time to time she sought for a reconciliation; but in vain. In the first number of her (serially published) autobiography she lamented that, partly through her own indiscretion, and partly from the cruel censure of false and evil tongues, she had lost the blessing of a father's love; and went on to declare that 'if strongest compunction, and uninterrupted hours of anguish, blended with self-conviction and filial love, can move his heart to pity and forgiveness, I shall with pride and unutterable transport throw myself at his feet to implore the only benefit I expect, his blessing and his pardon.' She also wrote him the following letter:—

'TO COLLEY CIBBER, ESQUIRE, AT HIS HOUSE IN
BERKELEY SQUARE,

'SATURDAY, *March 8, 1755*

'HONOURED SIR,—I doubt not you are sensible I last Saturday published the first number of a Narrative of my Life, in which I make a proper concession in regard to those unhappy miscarriages which have for many years deprived me of a father's fondness. As I am conscious of my errors, I thought I could not be too public in suing for your blessing and pardon; and only blush to think my youthful follies should draw so strong a compunction on

my mind in the meridian of my days, which I might so easily have avoided. Be assured, Sir, I am perfectly convinced I was more than much to blame; and that the hours of anguish I have felt have bitterly repaid me for the commission of every indiscretion, which was the unhappy motive of being so many years estranged from that happiness I now, as in duty bound, most earnestly implore. I shall, with your permission, Sir, send again, to know if I may be admitted to throw myself at your feet, and, with sincere and filial transport, endeavour to convince you that—I am, honoured Sir, Your truly penitent and dutiful daughter,

‘CHARLOTTE CHARKE.’

She appears to have flattered herself that having made what she called a public confession of her faults would lead to a reconciliation with her father, who was now eighty-four years of age. But the old man was inexorable, and Charlotte’s letter was returned to her in a blank envelope. She therefore printed it in a later number of her Narrative, presumably to show the public what a dutiful and penitent letter it was. But at the time, the shock of having it returned to her in such a manner made her very ill, not, she is careful to explain, rousing her to any sudden gust of passion, but preying upon her heart ‘with a slow and eating fire of distraction,’ which ended in a fever. When able to resume her Narrative, she printed her rather copy-book-like letter, and followed it up by a dissertation on the duty of forgiveness (especially on the part of fathers) characteristically backed up by quotations, not from Holy Scripture, but from the play of *George Barnwell*. She attributes her father’s persistent hardness of heart to the influence of her eldest sister, who, ‘though within a year of threescore, pursues her own interest, to the detriment of others, with the same artful vigilance that might be expected from a young sharper of twenty-four.’ Then follows another characteristic passage in which she expresses her very queer conception of Christian forgiveness:—

‘One thing I must insert for her mortification, that my conscience is quite serene ; and though she won’t suffer my father to be in friendship with me, I am perfectly assured that I have, in regard to any offences towards him, made my peace with the Power Supreme, which neither her falsehood nor artful malice could deprive me of. ’Tis now my turn to forgive, as being the injured party ; and to show her how much I choose to become her superior in mind, I not only pardon, but pity her.’

Whether she made any further overtures is not known ; but two years later Colley Cibber was gathered to his fathers, and all hopes of a reconciliation were at an end.

The last glimpse that we get of poor Charlotte Charke is in an account of a visit paid to her squalid habitation, soon after the publication of her *Memoirs*, by a publisher and his friend, who went to make a bargain with her for her story of *Henry Dumont*. The friend, some time afterwards, thus describes the scene in a contribution to the *Monthly Magazine*:—

‘Her habitation was a wretched thatched hovel, situate on the way to Islington, not very distant from the New River Head, where it was usual at that time for the scavengers to deposit the sweepings of the streets. The night preceding a heavy rain had fallen, which rendered this extraordinary seat of the Muses nearly inaccessible. . . . We did not attempt to pull the latch-string, but knocked at the door, which was opened by a tall, meagre, ragged figure, with a blue apron, indicating, what otherwise was doubtful, that it was a female before us. . . . The first object that presented itself was a dresser, clean, it must be confessed, and furnished with three or four coarse delft plates, and underneath an earthen pipkin, and a black pitcher with a snip out of it. To the right we perceived, and bowed to, the mistress of the mansion, sitting on a maimed chair, under the mantel-piece, by a fire merely sufficient to put us in mind of starving. On one hob sat a monkey, which, by way of welcome, chattered at our going in ; on the other a tabby cat of melancholy aspect ; and at our author’s feet, on the flounce of her dingy petticoat, reclined a dog, almost

a skeleton ! He raised his shaggy head, and eagerly staring with his bleared eyes, saluted us with a snarl. "Have done, Fidele ! these are friends." The tone of her voice had something in it humbled and disconsolate, a mingled effort of authority and pleasure. Poor soul ! few were her visitors of that description ; no wonder the creature barked. A magpie perched on the top rung of her chair, not an uncomely ornament ! and on her lap was placed a mutilated pair of bellows : the pipe was gone, an advantage in their present office ; they served as a succedaneum for a writing-desk, on which lay displayed her hopes and treasure, the manuscript of her novel. Her inkstand was a broken tea-cup ; the pen worn to a stump : she had but one ! A rough deal board, with three hobbling supporters, was brought for our convenience, on which, without further ceremony, we contrived to sit down, and enter into business. The work was read, remarks made, alterations suggested and agreed to, and thirty guineas demanded for the copy. The squalid housemaid, who had been an attentive listener, stretched forth her tawny neck with an eye of anxious expectation. The bookseller offered five guineas. Our authoress did not appear hurt ; disappointment had rendered her mind callous : however some altercation ensued. The visitor, seeing both sides pertinacious, interposed, and at his instance, the wary haberdasher of literature doubled his first proposal ; with this saving proviso, that his friend present would pay a moiety and run one half the risk, which was agreed to. Thus matters were accommodated, seemingly to the satisfaction of all parties ; the lady's original stipulation of fifty copies for herself being previously acceded to.'

Nothing is known of the remaining four or five years of this miserable woman's life. Her *History of Henry Dumont* duly appeared in 1756 ; and another story of hers, entitled *The Lover's Treat or Unnatural Hatred* was published 1758. It seems highly improbable that her literary labours can have brought in sufficient for her maintenance ; and we can only presume that she was aided by the bounty of the compassionate, or that she was compelled to apply for parish relief. She died on the 6th of April, 1760, aged about fifty years.

The title-page of Charlotte's autobiography bears the following apt quotation from the prologue to *The What d'ye call It*,—

‘This Tragic Story, or this Comic Jest,
May make you laugh, or cry—as you like best.’

It may perhaps do both. The eccentricity of her character, and the lively narration of her singular adventures, cannot fail to raise many a laugh; while the spectacle of a young lady of respectable birth, brought up in affluence, well-educated according to the notions of her day, and possessed of considerable natural talent, who was, to use her own words, such an ‘unfortunate devil,’ that the greater part of her life was spent in squalor and misery, may, at any rate ‘claim the passing tribute of a sigh.’

CATHERINE CLIVE

THE career of Catherine, or Kitty, Clive, as she was familiarly called, differs in many important points from that of most actresses of the Georgian period. In her case, there was no early strolling, with its attendant squalor and contamination, no tedious and unremunerative apprenticeship in the provincial theatres. She made her first appearance at Drury Lane at the age of eighteen, was an instantaneous success, held the stage, with increasing power and popularity, for forty years, and remained to the day of her retirement the spoiled darling of the public. Moreover, notwithstanding her separation from her husband, she indulged in no amatory 'adventures,' was untouched by the breath of scandal, and associated on terms of equality, both while on the stage and afterwards, with some of the most distinguished persons in the fashionable society of her day; to whom her conversational powers, her lively wit, and the even more lively ebullitions of her choleric temperament, proved a perpetual source of entertainment.

She was born in London in 1711, and was one of the numerous family of William Rafter, an Irish gentleman of good family and forfeited estates, who had married the daughter of a citizen of London, and settled down in what was then perhaps the salubrious neighbourhood of Fish Street Hill. Mr. Rafter is said to have received a handsome fortune with his wife; but this is scarcely credible when we learn that by the time Kitty was twenty-three he was entirely dependent on her for his support. At any rate,

his daughter received only the scantiest education; and, if we may believe a story told in the *Memoirs* of Lee Lewes, she was in her early days a domestic servant. Lewes says he was told by a Mr. Thomas Young that when his mother, in her maiden days, lodged with a fan-painter named Snell, in Church Row, Houndsditch, Kitty Raftor was her servant. Immediately opposite this house, the story goes on, was the Bull tavern, then kept by Watson, many years box-keeper at Drury Lane, and at this tavern were held the meetings of the famous Beef-steak Club. One day Kitty Raftor happened to be singing as she washed the door steps, and the open windows of the club-room opposite soon became crowded by an appreciative audience, all of whom were enchanted with the young singer's artless grace, and two of whom, Beard and Dunstall, interested themselves to get her an introduction to the theatre. But inaccuracy is the badge of all the tribe of theatrical memoir writers; and the reader may take his choice between this account and the equally circumstantial, but totally irreconcilable one, given by Chetwood in his *General History of the Stage*. Chetwood (who was prompter at Drury Lane, and knew Mrs. Clive intimately) informs us that she had an early genius for the stage, and had told him that when she was about twelve years old she and Miss Johnson (afterwards the first wife of Theophilus Cibber) used to 'tag' after the celebrated Mr. Wilkes whenever they saw him in the street, and gaze at him as a wonder.

'Miss *Raftor* had a facetious Turn of Humour, and infinite Spirits, with a Voice and Manner in singing Songs of Pleasantry peculiar to herself. Those Talents Mr *Theo. Cibber* and I (we all at that Time living together in one House) thought a sufficient passport for the *Theatre*. We recommended her to the *Laureat*, whose infallible Judgment soon found out her Excellencies; and the Moment he heard her sing, put her down in the List of Performers at twenty Shillings *per* Week. But never any Person of

her Age flew to Perfection with such Rapidity. . . . Her first Appearance was in the Play of *Mithridates* King of Pontus, in Ismenes, the Page to Ziphanes, in *Boy's Cloaths*, where a Song proper to the Circumstances of the Scene was introduced, which she performed with extraordinary Applause. But after this, like a Bullet in the Air, there was no distinguishing the Track, till it came to its utmost Execution.'

Chetwood goes on to relate in his quaint manner that he well remembered her appearance in the part of Phillida in Cibber's *Love in a Riddle*, an opera which the laureate had written in the manner of the astoundingly popular *Beggar's Opera*, with the object of recommending virtue and innocence instead of vice and roguery, but which Cibber's numerous enemies had conspired to damn. The house was in an uproar from the commencement; but when Miss Raftor came on, says the prompter, the tumult subsided, and he heard a person in the stage-box close to him call out to a fellow conspirator—'Zounds, Tom! take care, or this charming little devil will save all.' In the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Sir Theodore Martin tells us that she did save the piece; but this is a mistake. *Love in a Riddle*, as Cibber himself candidly admits in his *Apology*, was 'as vilely damned and hooted at as so vain a presumption in the idle cause of virtue could deserve.' But Kitty scored a success for herself; and followed it up so well that, within two years of her first appearance, her performance of Nell in *The Devil to Pay* established her reputation once for all as the greatest comic actress of her time.

In 1752, when twenty-one years of age, she married; making what on the face of it appeared to be a very good match with George Clive, a barrister who was brother to one judge and nephew to another. Two years later, Henry Fielding, in dedicating to her his farce of *The Intriguing Chambermaid*, took occasion to remark:—

'I shall not here dwell on anything so well-known as your theatrical merit. . . . But as great a favourite as you are with the audience, you would be much more so were they acquainted with your private character; could they see you laying out great part of the profits which arise to you from entertaining them so well, in the support of an aged father; did they see you who can charm them on the stage with personating the foolish and vicious characters of your sex, acting in real life the part of the best wife, the best daughter, and the best friend.'

A good daughter, sister, and friend, she continued to be; but her conjugal bliss was of short duration; and shortly after this, though precisely at what date cannot be ascertained, she and Clive separated by mutual consent—apparently for no other cause than incompatibility of temper. Clive, who, according to all accounts, says John Taylor, was a very learned and intelligent man, but without practice in his profession, became domestic companion to a gentleman of fortune named Ince, who was reputed to be 'the Templar' of the *Spectator* club; and although Kitty occasionally heard of him during the remaining half-century of his existence, she does not appear to have heard from him, or to have ever seen him again. One can readily understand that a dull and decorous man like Clive would find Kitty no easy person to live with in private, as actors and managers found her no very easy person to get on with in public life. In 1736, for example, Mrs. Cibber wished to take the part of Polly in *The Beggar's Opera*, a part at that time in the possession of Mrs. Clive. As Victor said, Mrs. Cibber, who was young and handsome, as well as a good singer, had every natural and acquired requisite to make the best Polly that had ever appeared, while Mrs. Clive, who was by no means so well suited for the part of Polly, would have made an incomparable Lucy. But the idea of giving up one of her principal parts was intolerable;

the hot-tempered Kitty lodged her complaint, and raised a storm; and, as Mrs. Cibber was comparatively new to the stage, she was compelled to abandon her claim. The quarrel caused a great hubbub amongst playgoers. Woodward seized the opportunity to bring out a little farce on the subject, entitled: 'The Beggar's Pantomime; or the Contending Columbines'; and another wit produced the following parody on the ballad of *Chevy Chase* :—

' Heaven prosper long our noble King,
Our lives, and save us all ;
A woeful quarrel lately did
In Drury Lane befall.

To charm the pit with speech and song
Dame Cibber took her way :
Players may rue who are unborn
The quarrel of that day.

Cibber, the syren of the stage,
A vow to Heaven did make,
Full twenty nights in Polly's part
She'd make the playhouse shake.

Whenas these tidings came to Clive,
Fierce Amazonian dame :
" Who is it thus," in rage she cries,
" Dares rob me of my claim ? "

With that she to the green-room flew,
Where Cibber meek she found ;
And sure, if friends had not been by,
Had felled her to the ground.'

But, quarrels notwithstanding, Clive steadily advanced in public estimation; and for several years was the principal attraction of Drury Lane Theatre. In 1741, in company with Quin, Ryan, and Madame Chateneuf, the dancer, she made a visit to Dublin, and played for a short time with immense applause at the Aungier Street theatre. In 1743 there was trouble at Drury Lane, notwithstanding the

accession of Garrick, who had recently leaped into fame. Fleetwood, the manager, was perpetually in difficulties, and salaries at length got so hopelessly in arrear that Garrick, together with several other actors and actresses, including Clive, revolted. Garrick's notion was that they could get a licence from the Duke of Grafton to perform at the Opera House, and set up for themselves. But when the Duke refused such a licence, the astute actor saw that there was nothing for it but to open negotiations for a reconciliation. Fleetwood, however, now perceived that he had the whip-hand; and although Garrick and several more were re-engaged, on terms somewhat less favourable than they had previously received, Macklin and Clive were proscribed, *pour encourager les autres*. The patentees of both houses appear to have acted in concert over this business, plainly seeing that by so doing they could reduce the actors' profits and augment their own. Macklin thought that Garrick had treacherously left him in the lurch, and his friends, headed by a certain Dr. Barrowby, invaded the pit of Drury Lane with a company of 'bruisers' and interrupted the performance, until Garrick's friends sent in after them a phalanx of thirty boxers, who cracked the skulls of the Macklinites, and cleared them out of the theatre. Kitty did not resort to fisticuffs; but in 1774, in order, as she says, to counteract certain false reports which had become current in consequence of her non-appearance, she issued a little sixpenny pamphlet of twenty-two pages, entitled *The Case of Mrs. Clive submitted to the Publick*, from which a passage or two may be quoted, both to show the facility with which Kitty could wield a pen in her own defence, and as exhibiting the awkward predicament in which an actor was at that time placed if he incurred the resentment of the monopolists of the two patent theatres. Kitty contends that the managers of these two theatres had conspired to reduce the incomes

of the performers, and that part of their plan of campaign had been to publish in the daily papers a false account of the actors' emoluments in order to enlist public sympathy on their own side. So far as her own case is concerned, she says, the facts are as follows:—

'Before the disputes happened betwixt the manager of Drury Lane theatre and his actors, I had articked for five years to receive £300 a year, though another performer on that stage received for seven years 500 guineas per year; and at the expiration of my agreement, the manager offered me an additional salary to continue at that theatre. . . . When the actors' affairs obliged 'em to return to the theatre last winter, under such abatements of their salaries as hardly afforded the greater part of them a subsistence, I was offered by the manager of Drury Lane theatre such terms as bore no proportion to what he gave other performers, or to those he had offered me at the beginning of the season. They were such as I was advised not to accept, because it was known they were proposed for no reason but to insult me, and make me seek for better at the other theatre; for I knew it had been settled by some dark agreement that part of the actors were to go to Covent Garden theatre, and others to Drury Lane. I did, indeed, apprehend that I should meet with better terms at Covent Garden, because that manager had made many overtures to get me into his company the preceding season, and many times before. But when I applied to him, he offered me exactly the same which I had refused at the other theatre, and which I likewise rejected, but was persuaded to accept some very little later, rather than seem obstinate in not complying as well as others; and yielded so far to the necessity of the time as to act under a much less salary than several other performers on that stage, and submitted to pay a sum of money for my benefit, notwithstanding I had had one clear of all expense for nine years before—an advantage the first performers had been thought to merit for near thirty years, and had grown into a custom.'

However, when once she had accepted an engagement at Covent Garden, she submitted entirely to the manager's direction, did all she could to promote his interests, and acted as though she meant to stay there. But she found

there was a private understanding between the two managers that she should be forced to make application to be taken on next season at Drury Lane—perhaps at a further reduction in terms.

‘At the end of the acting season the manager sent an office-keeper to me with some salary that was due, who required a receipt in full. I told him a very great part of my agreements were yet due, and requested to see the manager, who came and acknowledged them, and promised to bring one of the gentlemen who was present at our engagements in a day or two, and pay me ; but he has not paid me, nor have I ever seen him since, or as much as heard from him.’

Not only did she receive no notice of dismissal, but the manager’s action implied that her services were to be retained.

‘It has always been a custom in theatres that if ever any actor or actress was to be discharged, or their allowance lessened, they were acquainted with it at the end of the season ; and the reason of this will appear to be the giving them a proper notice to provide for themselves. This the manager of Covent Garden did to all his company whom he designed to discharge, or whose allowance was to be lessened, except to me, which made me actually then conclude he determined I should continue with him, till I was undeceived by his playbills with the names of the actresses in parts I used to perform ; so that he has not only broke through the customs of the theatre, but those in practice almost everywhere, in dismissing me, and has done me a real injury in such an unprecedented act of injustice ; for had I been informed of his design at the end of the season, I could have made terms to have acted in Ireland, where I had met with most uncommon civilities, and received very great advantages, which I shall ever remember with the utmost gratitude, and take this and every other opportunity to acknowledge.’

She points out, moreover, that actors are not in the position of other servants, who, when dismissed, have thousands of other possible employers to apply to, for it is unlawful for

them to act anywhere but in the two patent theatres. Consequently, not only has it been customary to give actors notice of discharge, but it has also been customary never to discharge any but such as had either neglected their business, or become obnoxious to the public. The manager of Drury Lane, she goes on to say, though knowing well enough of her disengagement from the other theatre, has made no application to her (as he has done to some others who quitted the other house at the same time as herself), to act for him.

‘The reasons which obliged me to leave him still subsist. He owes me a hundred and sixty pounds twelve shillings, which he has acknowledged to be justly due, and promised payment of it by last Christmas, to a person of too great consequence for me to mention here—the greater part of it money I expended for clothes for his use. He offered me last season not near half as much as he afterwards agreed to give another performer, and less than he gave to some others in his company; so that I must conclude (as every one knows there are agreements between the managers) that there is a design to distress me, and reduce me to such terms as I cannot comply with.’

As to her performances, she says, the audience are the only proper judges. But she may venture to affirm that her labour and application have been unequalled by any other performer. She has not only acted in almost all the plays, but also in farces, and in musical entertainments, frequently playing two parts a night, to the prejudice of her health. She has likewise been at great expense for masters in singing, and has had additional expenses for clothes and other necessities for the theatre, amounting to over £100 a year. If any should think she is making this too grave a matter, she begs them to remember that it is one upon which her liberty and livelihood depend; and she submits her case to the judgment of the public, most earnestly soliciting the favour and protection of those who have always

hitherto treated her with great generosity and indulgence. Kitty's appeal, however, did not have the effect she desired and expected; and she was not reinstated at Drury Lane until Garrick became manager in April 1747. After that date, with the exception of one short visit to Dublin, she never performed anywhere else; and for twenty-two years her only rival in public favour was the great 'Roscius' himself.

Her relations with Garrick were not always of the most amicable character. Horace Walpole, in some sneering comments on the 'ridiculous pomp' of the great actor's funeral in 1779, remarks that Garrick's envy and jealousy were unbounded, and that he hated Mrs. Clive until she quitted the stage, though he then cried her up to the skies in order to depress Mrs. Abington. But, on the other hand, John Taylor observes, with some degree of truth, that Mrs. Clive was eminent as an actress in London before Garrick made his appearance at Drury Lane, and that she never forgave him for throwing her (and all others) into the shade. The admiration which these two capital performers could not help occasionally expressing for each other's powers was forced from them against their wills. 'One night,' says Taylor, 'as Garrick was performing King Lear, she stood behind the scenes to observe him, and in spite of the roughness of her nature, was so deeply affected that she sobbed one minute and abused him the next, and at length, overcome by his pathetic touches, she hurried from the place with the following extraordinary tribute to the universality of his powers—"Damn him! I believe he could act a gridiron!"' Tate Wilkinson has preserved an amusing instance or two of her squabbles with the great actor-manager. On one occasion, *Lethe* (in which Mrs. Clive took the part of the Fine Lady) was to be acted by desire of several persons of distinction. The bill—whether

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by accident or design Tate could not say—merely announced, ‘A dramatic satire called *Lethe*. The new character of Lord Chalkstone by Mr. Garrick,’ without any mention of Woodward, or Yates, or Clive, who were all in the cast. Thereupon—

‘Madam Clive at noon came to the theatre and furiously rang the alarm bell: for her name being omitted was an offence she construed so heinous that nothing but vengeance, and blood! blood! Iago was the word, and it was no more strange than true that Garrick feared to meet that female spirit . . . Mrs. Clive was a mixture of combustibles—she was passionate, cross, vulgar, yet sensible, and a very generous woman, and as a comic actress of genuine worth—*indeed, indeed*, she was a diamond of the first water. When her farce of the *Fine Lady* came on she was received with the usual expression of gladness on her approach, as so charming an actress so truly deserved; and her song from the Italian opera, where she was free with a good ridiculous imitation of Signora Mingotti, who was the darling favourite at the King’s Theatre, and admired by all the amateurs, she was universally encored, and came off the stage much sweetened in temper and manners from her first going on. “Aye,” says she in triumph, “that artful devil could not hurt me with the Town, though he had struck my name out of the bills.” She laughed and joked about her late ill-humour as if she could have kissed all around her . . . and what added to her applause was her inward joy, triumph, and satisfaction, in finding the little great man was afraid to meet her.’

Tate Wilkinson was himself responsible for one of the scenes which he describes with such ungrammatical gusto. Mrs. Clive had written a farce, entitled *The Rehearsal or Bayes in Petticoats*, which was to be performed on the occasion of her benefit in 1750. But a few days before the date fixed, Wilkinson inveigled his friend Joseph Austin away to Portsmouth, to play for him there, and Austin was unable to get back to London soon enough to take the part which had been allotted to him in the farce for Mrs. Clive’s

benefit. She was therefore reduced to the alternative of abandoning her new farce in favour of somebody else's old and familiar one, or of having Austin's part read; and she decided on the latter course. But her piece was unfortunately damned, 'and the dreadful doom of it she attributed entirely to the neglective and audacious behaviour of that impudent Austin.' Both Austin and Garrick beat a retreat, for they knew what to expect; Kitty being, as Wilkinson declares, the terror of the whole green-room. But after a little while Garrick's curiosity got the better of him, and he returned to the scene of battle, thinking he might enjoy the tumult without being observed. But Kitty spied him, and pounced upon him like a cat on a mouse, pouring out a bitter and furious harangue, in which she charged him with aiding and abetting in a plot to destroy her fame. Garrick protested his innocence—denounced Austin, damned Wilkinson—and at length succeeded in pacifying the infuriated actress and authoress by assurances that her acting in the piece had charmed him, and that the farce itself was one of the most entertaining and best written pieces that had been produced for years.

Mrs. Clive wrote several farces on various occasions, usually for her own benefits; but the only one that was ever printed was *The Rehearsal*. It contains some amusing touches. Mrs. Hazard, the principal character, a violent-tempered woman (played by herself), has written a 'Burletto,' and the comedy turns on the preparations for its rehearsal, which after all never takes place.

'MRS. HAZARD. . . . I have taken great care to be delicate; I may be dull, but I'm delicate, so that I'm not at all afraid of the Town. I wish I could say as much of the performers. Lord! what pity 'tis the great tragedy actors can't sing! I'm about a new thing, which I shall call a Burletto, which I take from some incidents in *Don Quixote*, that I believe will be as high humour as

was ever brought upon the stage. But then I shall want actors. Oh! if that dear Garrick could but sing, what a Don Quixote he'd make!

'WITLING.—Don't you think Barry would be better? He's so tall, you know, and so finely made for 't. If I was to advise I would carry that to Covent Garden.

'MRS. HAZARD.—Covent Garden! Lord! I wouldn't think of it. It stands in such bad air.

'WITLING.—Bad air!

'MRS. HAZARD.—Ay: the actors can't play there above three days a week. They have more need of a physician than a poet at that house.

'WITLING.—But pray, Madam, you say you are to call your new thing a Burletto; what is a Burletto?

'MRS. HAZARD.—What is a Burletto? Why, haven't you seen one at the Haymarket?

'WITLING.—Yes, but I don't know what it is for all that.

'MRS. HAZARD.—Don't you! Why then, let me die if I can tell you: but I believe it's a kind of poor relation to an opera.'

In the course of the play she took occasion to air some of her grievances, under cover of poking fun at herself as well as at some of the other actors. When Witling hears that one of the characters in her piece is a mad woman, he asks who is to act that.

'MRS. HAZARD.—Why, Mrs. Clive to be sure, though I wish she don't spoil it, for she's so conceited and insolent that she won't let me teach it her. You must know, when I told her I had a part for her in a performance of mine, in the prettiest manner I was able (for one must be civil to those sort of people when one wants them), says she—"Indeed, Madam, I must see the whole piece, for I shall take no part in a new thing without chusing that which I think I can act best. I have been a great sufferer already by the managers not doing justice to my genius; but I hope I shall next year convince the Town what fine judgment they have, for I intend to play a capital tragedy part for my own benefit.

'WITLING.—And what did you say to her, pray?

'MRS. HAZARD.—Say to her! Why, do you think I would

venture to expostulate with her? No, I desired Mr. Garrick would take her in hand, so he ordered her the part of the mad woman directly.'

The little piece is good enough of its kind, and one would scarcely expect it to have been damned so unequivocally as Tate Wilkinson says it was; though Garrick's commendation of it as one of the most entertaining and best written pieces that had been produced for years must be set down to his anxiety to pacify the irritable lady at all costs. Another farce of hers, entitled a *Sketch of a Fine Lady's Rout*, was played on her benefit night in 1763, and although it was never printed, an account of it in a contemporary newspaper seems to show promise of a lively entertainment. The characters are Sir Jeremy Jenkins, a city knight; two of his clerks; a footman; Mr. Nettle, an attorney; Lady Jenkins (played by Mrs. Clive), and Jane, her maid. The piece opens with a conversation between the clerks on the absurdity of Lady Jenkins setting up for, and running into, all the extravagances of a woman of quality, when her husband has not been dubbed more than a month or so. Then Jane comes in, half asleep, weary with waiting for her mistress who has not yet returned home from some party, though it is seven o'clock in the morning. When her ladyship does come home to supper, Sir Jeremy is just sitting down to his breakfast. The pair converse on the manners of the polite world, and she relates how, after persistent attempts on two or three Duchesses, she has at last gained admittance to the house of one of the number. Then, Sir Jeremy being called away on business, Lady Jenkins recapitulates her losses at play, pulls out her purse to see how much money she has left, and, overcome with weariness, falls asleep, leaving the cash spread out on a table. A moment afterwards Jane enters with a cup of coffee that had been called for; but, seeing her mistress to be fast

asleep, she steals two or three guineas from the heap on the table, and softly goes out again. Then Sir Jeremy, who has received a letter from his bankers asking for £300 which they have advanced to her ladyship on his account, comes rushing in to upbraid her for her extravagance; but, seeing the money lying on the table, first pockets that, and then wakes my lady. A scene of violent altercation follows, which is interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Nettle, the attorney. Sir Jeremy asks him whether he is bound to satisfy his banker's demand for the £300, and, after putting a few questions to the lady, Mr. Nettle decides that he is. But the wily attorney advises Sir Jeremy to bring an action against any person to whom her ladyship has lost more than £10 at one time, promising him large damages, and anticipating a fine bill of costs for himself. When Lady Jenkins names the time and place where she lost £100 to one person, the lawyer is jubilant; but when she goes on to mention the person's name, and he finds that it was his own wife, he runs raving from the room. After this the play ends by Lady Jenkins promising never to play again for any sum that can make her blush, or her husband uneasy. It is amusing to learn that the author of this little diatribe against gambling was herself greatly addicted to cards, and if her losses did not make her blush, they certainly caused her to flush, and, likewise, occasionally to use language which in the twentieth century is considered unfit for publication!

From time to time, so long as she remained on the stage, Mrs. Clive enlivened the green-room with her quarrels both with the manager and the performers. Before Mrs. Woffington came to Drury Lane she and Mrs. Clive had clashed on various occasions; and afterwards their perpetual squabbles caused much diversion to their respective partisans. According to Davies—

‘Woffington was well-bred, seemingly very calm, and at all times mistress of herself. Clive was frank, open, impetuous; what came uppermost in her mind she spoke without reserve: the other blunted the sharp speeches of Clive by her apparently civil, but keen and sarcastic replies: thus she often threw Clive off her guard by an arch severity which the warmth of the other could not easily parry. No two women of high rank ever hated one another more unreservedly than these great dames of the theatre. But though the passions of each were as lofty as those of a first Dutchess, yet they wanted the courtly art of concealing them; and this occasioned, now and then, a very grotesque scene in the green-room.’

In 1761 she had a quarrel with Shuter, which amused not only the green-room, but the whole town. She had selected for her benefit a play called *The Island of Slaves*, which was avowedly a translation from the French, and by some believed to be a translation of her own making. The selection of such a piece was adversely commented on in a letter to the papers, to which she replied saying that, while she had always despised the politics of the French, she never yet heard that we were at war with their wit; and, moreover, that it need not be imputed to her as a crime to have an avowed translation produced, seeing that ‘one part in three of all the comedies now acting are taken from the french . . . without confessing from whence they came.’ But, having a suspicion that Shuter was the author of the newspaper attack, she also addressed to him the following curious epistle:—

‘SIR—I Much Desire you would Do Me the Favour to let me know if you was the author of a letter in the *Dayle Gazetteer* relating to this New Piece I had for my benefet; as it was intended to hurt my Benefet, and serve yours everybody will naturely conclude you was the author if you are not ashamed of being so I suppose you will own it: if you really was not concerned in wrightin it I shall be very glad: for I should be extreemly shock’d that an actor should be guilty of so base an action; I dont often

take the liberty of wrighting to the Publick but am Now under a Nessity of Doing it—therefore Desier your answer.'

The letter is not up to Kitty's usual level in composition, to say nothing of the spelling; and Shuter maliciously published it. But he also went to the trouble of swearing an affidavit before a magistrate to clear himself of the imputation of having attempted to injure her benefit. Kitty had frequent bickerings with Woodward; but Davies records one instance in which she behaved with remarkable (and, as the other players evidently thought, disappointing) self-control. On this occasion when Woodward was acting Brisk to her Lady Froth in Congreve's *Double Dealer*, it happened that in the hurry of dressing she had laid on an extraordinary quantity of rouge. In the scene wherein Brisk has to criticise the lady's heroic poem, instead of saying, 'Your *coachman* having a red face,' Woodward, either wilfully or by accident, said, 'Your *Ladyship* having a red face.' The house rang with peals of laughter, and Woodward looked, or affected to look, very abashed. But Clive, says Davies, bore the trial heroically. When she and Woodward left the stage for the green-room, all the other players gathered round, expecting a display of Kitty's fireworks; but she merely said, quite quietly, 'Come, Mr. Woodward, let us rehearse the next scene, lest more blunders should fall out.' Quin and she could never get on together when they happened to be acting in the same company; and many stories are told of their frequent jars. But it was at Garrick that her shafts were mostly aimed—for a period of more than twenty years. John Bernard says that whenever Garrick offended her, Kitty would drive him about the house, like a terrier after a rat, and abuse him to his face, till he was completely dumfounded.

'One day he completely lost his patience, and exclaimed, "I'll

tell you what, Mrs. Clive, I—I—I tell you what, ma'am—if you—if you repeat such language to me—me—David Garrick, who am your manager, I—I—I'll instantly discharge you." "You dare not," she replied. "I dare not?" "No,—you know if I was to walk out of your doors, you'd run to my house, in a shower of rain with your coat off, to bring me back again?"

It is true enough, no doubt, that Garrick would have put up with a good deal of abuse rather than lose Kitty's services; and his biographer, Davies, says that 'whenever he had a difference with Mrs. Clive, he was happy to make a drawn battle of it.'

In the *Private Correspondence of David Garrick with the most Celebrated Persons of his Time*, edited, in two volumes, by James Boaden, in 1831, there are a number of highly interesting letters to and from Mrs. Clive. Boaden says he has corrected the spelling, and gives for so doing the very quaint reason, that she lived with Garrick afterwards on the happiest terms. But although Kitty's spelling was certainly uncommonly bad, there is never any possibility of mistaking her meaning; and when she had a grievance, few people could make out a better case for themselves than she could. In October 1765, for example, she gave the manager a piece of her mind in the following terms:—

'SIR,—I beg you would do me the favour to let me know if it was by your order that my money was stopped last Saturday: you was so good, indeed, last week to bid me take *care* or I should be catched,—I thought you was laughing, and did not know it was a determined thing.

It was never before expected of a performer to be in waiting when their names are not in the *papers* or *bills*; the public are witness for me whether I have ever neglected my business. You may (if you please to recollect) remember I have never disappointed you four times since you have been a manager; I have always had good health, and have ever been above subterfuge. I hope this stopping of money is not a French fashion; I believe you will not find any part of the English laws that will support this sort of

treatment of an actress, who has a right, from her character and service on the stage, to expect some kind of respect.

‘I have never received any favours from you or Mr. Lacy, nor shall ever ask any of you, therefore hope you will be so good to excuse me for endeavouring to defend myself from what I think an injury; it has been too often repeated to submit to it any longer. You stopped four days’ salary when I went to Dublin, though you gave me leave to go before the house shut up, and said you would do without me. If I had known your intention, I would not have lost any of my salary, as my agreement with Mr. Barry did not begin till our house had shut up. I had my money last year stopped at the beginning of the season, for not coming to rehearse two parts that I could repeat in my sleep, and which must have cost me two guineas, besides the pleasure of coming to Town.

‘I am sure I have always done everything in my power to serve and oblige you: the first I have most undoubtedly succeeded in; the latter I have always been unfortunately unsuccessful in, though I have taken infinite pains.

‘The year Mrs. Vincent came on the stage, it cost me above five pounds to go to and from London to rehearse with her, and teach her the part of Polly; I could not be called on to do it, as it was long before the house opened,—it was to oblige Mr. Garrick. I have never envied you your equipages nor grandeur, the fine fortune you have already and must still be encreasing. I have had but a very small share of the public money: you gave Mrs. Cibber £600 for playing sixty nights, and £300 to me for playing a hundred and eighty,—out of which I can make it appear it cost me £100 in necessaries for the stage; sure you need not want to take anything from it. . . .’

Whether this voluble and vigorous appeal accomplished its object or not we cannot tell, for Garrick’s answer has not been preserved. But she was not always successful; and, to say truth, she was frequently not only extremely touchy, but unreasonable, especially in connection with her benefits. In February 1768 she was deeply aggrieved at the date which had been set down for her; and wrote to the managers saying she was not to be the dupe of their ill-treatment, adding, ‘Whether I am injured or not will appear to all who are

imparsial: as to your sneering about my consequence, you may take what steps you please with your power, but you can't mortifie me.' Garrick replied the next day, saying that she always chose to have some quarrel at her benefit, but in this instance, at any rate, there was no occasion for anything of the kind, for she had been given the best day of the week, and the arrangement had been made in all kindness to her. But she was not to be mollified; and on the 18th of February addressed to Garrick the following angry epistle, which, as the original is preserved in the Forster collection at South Kensington, can here be given *verbatim et literatim*:—

'I am Much Surprised to hear that you have fixed the 17 of March for my benefit, and that Mrs. Dancer is to have the Monday before (which as Mr. Hopkins tells me was Designed for Barry; and hope I shall not be guilty of vanity in saying that upon Drury Lane Theatre Neither Mr. Barry nor Mrs. Dancer have a right to their benefits before me; I have Done you great Service this Season and at every Call when they either Cou'd not or Wou'd not play have been the Stop gap in playing principal parts—and even when I have been extremely ill; and Do not Suppose that expostulation will have any effect to alter what Mr. Lacy and you have pleased to settle Therefore all I mean by giving you this trouble is to assure you that I will not accept of that Day, nor will I advertise for it, if I am wrong in this Determination I may loose my friends and they will Naturely think you have acted justly by Your hum Servt
C. CLIVE.'

Garrick again tried to smooth her down; but she fastened upon some innocent expression in his letter and replied: 'Any one who sees your letter would suppose I was kept at your Theatre out of Charitey. If you will look over the number of times I have play'd this season, you must think I have deservd the money you give me'; to which the manager rejoined:—

'DEAR CLIVE,—How can you be so ridiculous, and still so cross, to mistake every word of my letter. . . . You will find, in your

present humour, objections to any day, but we really meant you *Kindly* in giving you your own day, that you might avoid opera nights, and have nobody to come immediately before or after you. This I did not do out of *charity*, but out of that respect which I ever pay to genius, and it is not my fault if Mrs. Clive will not be as rational off the stage, as she is meritorious on it.'

By this time, however, Kitty was getting weary of the stage, and contemplating retirement. Garrick's biographer, Davies, conveys the impression that Clive and he parted on anything but amicable terms. He says that about a year after the retirement of Mrs. Pritchard, it was rumoured that her constant companion and friend, Mrs. Clive, intended to follow her example; and that Garrick thereupon sent his prompter to know what truth there was in the report. But to such a messenger she disdained to give an answer. Garrick then sent his brother George, and Mrs. Clive was scarcely more civil to him, telling him that if his brother wished to know her mind he should call on her himself. When Garrick did call, Davies says that he complimented her on her great merit as an actress, and expressed his hope that she intended to remain on the stage some years longer. Her answer was a look of contempt, and a decisive negative.

'He asked how much she was worth; she replied briskly, as much as himself. Upon his smiling at his supposed ignorance or misinformation, she explained herself by telling him that *she* knew when she had enough, though *he* never would. He then entreated her to renew her engagement for three or four years; she peremptorily refused. Upon repeating his regret at her leaving the stage, she frankly told him she hated hypocrisy, for she was sure he would light up candles for joy of her leaving him—but that it would be attended with some expense!'

It is likely enough that there was some such scene as this; but their differences must have been soon healed; for not only did she not part with him on bad terms, but she

remained on friendly and even affectionate terms with him to the end of his life. When it was settled that she should take formal leave of the stage, on the occasion of her benefit, in April 1769, Garrick at once offered to play for her; and she wrote to him saying:—

‘I am most extremely obliged for your very polite letter. How charming you can be when you are good; I believe there is only one person in the world who has ever known the difference. I shall certainly make use of the favour you offer me; it gives me a double pleasure—the entertainment my friends will receive from your performance, and the being convinced that you have a sort of sneaking kindness for your Pivy. I suppose I shall have you tapping me on the shoulder (as you do to Violante) when I bid you farewell, and desiring one tender look before we part, though perhaps you may recollect and toss the pancake into the cinders. You see I never forget your good things. Pray make my best compliments to Mrs. Garrick, and believe I shall always have sincere pleasure when I can assure you I am, your obliged and humble servant,

C. CLIVE.’

Garrick endorsed this—‘A love letter—the first I ever had from that truly great comedian, Mrs. Clive.’ It was by no means the last, as will be seen. A short time before the date fixed for her final benefit Garrick fell ill, but he wrote to reassure her with news of his recovery; and she promptly replied:—

‘I would not stay till the 24th to thank you for your very kind letter. I am extremely glad to hear you continue to be so very well. I have often enquired after you of your brother George:—now, do not say—ay, for your own sake; for when I heard you was in such great pain I was most sincerely sorry. In the next place, to be sure, I am *glad* you are well, for the sake of my audience, who will have the pleasure to see their own Don Felix. What signifies fifty-two? They had rather see *the* Garrick and *the* Clive at a hundred-and-four than any of the moderns;—the ancients, you know, have always been admired. I do assure you, I am at present in such health and such spirits, that when I recollect I am an old woman I am astonished. My dear Town are

giving me such applause every time they see me that I am in great fear for myself on my benefit night: I shall be overcome with kindness.'

She then adds, respecting another matter, the only reference to her husband to be found in any of her correspondence: 'You are very much mistaken if you imagine I shall be sorry to hear Mr. Clive is well; I thank God I have no malice or hatred to anybody: besides, it is so long ago since I thought he used me ill, that I have quite forgot it. I am very glad he is well and happy.'

The pieces selected for her final benefit, on the 24th of April 1769, were *The Wonder* and *Lethe*. All the pit was taken into the boxes, the house was crowded with a brilliant audience, and was, indeed, not half large enough to accommodate all who had applied for seats. When the play was over, Kitty spoke the following epilogue, which had been written by her friend and neighbour, Horace Walpole:—

'With Glory satiate, from the bustling stage,
Still in his Prime—and much about my Age,
Imperial CHARLES (if ROBERTSON says true)
Retiring, bade the jarring World adieu!
Thus I, long honour'd with your partial Praise,
(A Debt my swelling Heart with Tears repays!
—Scarce can I speak—forgive the grateful Pause)
Resign the noblest Triumph, your Applause.
Content with humble Means, yet proud to own
I owe my Pittance to your Smiles alone;
To private Shades I bear the golden Prize,
The Meed of Favour in a Nation's Eyes;
A Nation brave, and sensible, and free—
Poor CHARLES! how little when compar'd to me!

Ill was that Mind with sad Retirement pleas'd,
The very Cloister that he sought he teas'd;
And sick, at once, both of himself and Peace,
He died a Martyr to unwelcome Ease.
Here ends the Parallel—my generous Friends,
My Exit no such tragic Fate attends;
I will not die—let no vain Panic seize you—
If I repent—I'll come again and please you.'

There were no two opinions about Kitty Clive's superlative merit as a comic actress. She had performed over two hundred characters at Drury Lane; and being ambitious to make a figure in the higher comedy, and even in tragedy, she had sometimes appeared, as Fielding delicately phrases it, very inferior to herself. But whenever she kept clear of anything serious or genteel, she was always the joy of her audience. Lady Townley, and other such characters in high comedy, were beyond her; but in affected imitations of the fine lady she was always excellent; and for the representation of country girls, romps, hoydens, dowdies, superannuated beauties, or viragoes, she seemed, as Davies says, to have been expressly formed by Nature. She created a number of parts of which the author scarcely furnished an outline; for, provided there were any nature in it, her extraordinary talents could raise the merest dramatic trifle to a character of the first importance. And her mirth, we are told, was so genuine that 'he must have been more or less than man who could be grave when Clive was disposed to be merry.' Davies roundly declared that he would as soon expect to see another Butler, or another Rabelais, or another Swift, as another Clive.

Some sixteen years before her retirement from the stage, Horace Walpole had made Mrs. Clive the tenant, rent-free for life, of a house on his estate at Twickenham, generally known as Little Strawberry Hill, but after her occupation familiarly termed by him 'Cliveden.' She remained his tenant and neighbour for a further sixteen years after her retirement, and throughout all this long period of thirty-two years, there are constant references to her in his gossipy letters. In 1753, when sending to one of his correspondents a copy of Topham's rather abusive paper, *The World*, in which was an article supposed to reflect upon himself, he says:—

‘I met Mrs. Clive two nights ago, and told her I had been in the meadows, but would walk there no more, for there was all the world. “Well,” says she, “and don’t you like the *World*? I hear it was very clever last Thursday!”’

In the course of the following year he informed Richard Bentley that his chief employment at Twickenham was planting at Mrs. Clive’s, whither he removed all his superabundancies. He had lately planted the green lane leading from the garden to the Common, and when, after this was done, she asked what they should call it, he answered ‘What would you call it but Drury Lane?’ In 1757 the Earl of Radnor left Kitty a legacy of £50, and Horace writes: ‘You never saw anything so droll as Mrs. Clive’s countenance, between the heat of the summer, the pride in her legacy, and the efforts to appear unconcerned.’ In January 1760, he reports to George Montagu an agreeable supper at Mrs. Clive’s, when there were present Miss West, his niece, Miss Cholmondeley, Murphy, the actor and dramatist, and two or three more: ‘Miss Cholmondeley is lively; you know how entertaining the Clive is, and Miss West is an absolute original.’ In September of the same year he writes to the Earl of Stafford:—

‘I cannot help telling your lordship how I was diverted the night I returned hither. I was sitting with Mrs. Clive, her sister, and brother, in the bench near the road at the end of her long walk. We heard a violent scolding: and looking out, saw a pretty woman standing by a high chaise, in which was a young fellow, and a coachman riding by. The damsel had lost her hat, her cap, her cloak, her temper, and her senses, and was more drunk and more angry than you can conceive. Whatever the young man had or had not done to her, she would not ride in the chaise with him, but stood cursing and swearing in the most outrageous style, and when she had vented all the oaths she could think of, she at last wished *perfidion* might seize him. You may imagine how we laughed. The fair intoxicate turned round and cried “I am laughed at! Who is it? What! Mrs. Clive? Kitty Clive? No,

Kitty Clive would never behave so!" I wish you could have seen my neighbour's confusion. She certainly did not grow paler than ordinary. I laugh while I repeat it to you.'

After her retirement, Walpole naturally saw more of her, and he frequently walked with her in the meadows, or took tea at her house, or made one at her card-parties. John Taylor remarks that it seems strange for a man of learning and elegant taste, such as Horace Walpole, to have been attached to a woman whose manners were so rough and vulgar as those of Mrs. Clive. But, to say nothing of the fact that, as Davies reports, Mrs. Clive's company in private life had always been courted not only by men but also by women of high rank and character, 'to whom she rendered herself very agreeable,' it is quite evident that the wit, humour, and dramatic vivacity of Kitty's conversation were such as could not often be matched in the neighbourhood of Twickenham; whilst her various oddities and somewhat unconventional behaviour only afforded Walpole additional entertainment. He even took much delight in the society of her brother, who left the stage about a year after she did, and was then taken into her house at Strawberry Hill; for although Jemmy Raftor, as Lord Nuneham reports, was a wretched actor, hideous in person and in face, and vulgarly awkward in his general appearance, he was also a man of some information, much observation, with an extraordinary fund of original humour, and in the art of telling a story absolutely unrivalled. One can imagine how Walpole would have laughed for days afterwards, and what piquant letters he would have written to some of his far-away correspondents about it, if he had happened to be present at the card-party described by Frederick Reynolds the dramatist. Reynolds tells us that his grandmother, Mrs. West, who lived in a large house facing Montpellier Row, Twickenham, was 'queen of all the card-players of that card-playing place.'

100 COMEDY QUEENS OF THE GEORGIAN ERA

Four old maids of Montpellier Row, who were better known as 'Manille,' 'Spadille,' 'Basto,' and 'Punto,' than by their own proper names, were his grandmother's principal subjects. Every night these ladies assembled at one another's houses in rotation, and on the first of every month each took her turn to give a grand party. On New Year's Day, 1772, a fête of more than usual splendour was given by Mrs. West, the principal attraction of which was the celebrated Mrs. Clive.

'Owing to her amazing celebrity as a comic actress, and as, during her theatrical career, calumny itself had never aimed the slightest arrow at her fame, honest Kitty Clive (for so she was familiarly called) was much noticed in the neighbourhood. Yet from her eccentric disposition, strange, uncertain temper, and frank, blunt manner, Mrs. Clive did not always go off with quite so much *éclat* in private as in public life; particularly if she happened to be crossed by that touchstone of temper, gaming.'

The future dramatist, an observant and mischievous urchin of seven or eight, was greatly impressed by the stately dulness and formality of this antiquated party. 'Manille,' 'Spadille,' 'Basto,' 'Punto,' and the rest of the guests, with huge caps on their little heads, rouged faces, white wigs, compressed waists, extended hips, and limping gaits, after sipping their tea, exchanging superfluous information about the weather, congratulating one another on their good looks, and so forth, at length proceeded to the serious business of the evening.

'Quadrille was proposed, and all immediately took their stations, either as players or betters. Impelled by my dramatic propensity, I stationed myself close to Mrs. Clive. . . . It did not require much discrimination or knowledge of the game to discover the loser from the winner. I soon observed Mrs. Clive's countenance alternately redden and turn pale; while her antagonist vainly attempted the suppression of a satisfaction that momentarily betrayed itself in the curling corners of her ugly mouth, and in

the twinkling of her piggish eyes. At this sight, Mrs. Clive's spleen was redoubled. At last her Manille went, and with it the remains of her temper. Her face was of a universal crimson, and tears of rage seemed ready to start into her eyes. At that very moment, as Satan would have it, her opponent, a dowager, whose hoary head and eyebrows were as white as those of an Albiness, triumphantly and briskly demanded payment for two black aces. "Two black aces!" answered the enraged loser, in a voice rendered almost unintelligible by passion, "here, take the money; though I wish instead I could give you *two black eyes, you old white cat!*"

He goes on to say that Mrs. Clive accompanied her words with such a threatening gesture that the stately, starched old lady, who, in her eagerness to receive her winnings had half risen from her chair, fell back again as if she had been shot, and sat fixed and gasping for some moments, with open mouth and closed eyes. The other guests were so startled as to be momentarily arrested in their various occupations—one lady's hand stuck midway between her snuff-box and her nose; 'Basto,' who had turned the cock of a lemonade urn, stood vacantly staring while the fluid overflowed her glass on to the floor—then young Frederick could contain himself no longer, and burst out into such a loud and uncontrollable fit of laughter, that his grandmother promptly turned him out of the room, and he saw no more.

Mrs. Clive's correspondence with Garrick after her retirement is more amicable, but by no means less amusing, than that concerned with their bickerings while she was on the stage. In January 1774 she wrote to beg his interest in favour of the son of a neighbour named Crofts, who wished to get into the Excise, beginning her letter: 'I should suppose when you see Twickenham, you will not presently imagine whom the letter can come from, you have so entirely forgot *me,*' and informing him, amongst other things, that—'I might date this letter from the Ark:

we are so surrounded with water that it is impossible for any carriage to come to me, or for me to stir out, so that at present my heavenly place is a little devilish.' And when Garrick replied, wanting to know more about young Crofts before attempting to further his interests, that very natural inquiry produced the following characteristic epistle:—

'WONDERFUL SIR,—Who have been for these thirty years contradicting an old-established proverb—you cannot make a brick without straw ; but you have done what is infinitely more difficult, for you have made actors and actresses without genius ; that is, you have made them pass for such, which has answered your end, though it has given you infinite trouble:—you never took much with yourself, for you could not help acting well, therefore I do not think you have much merit in that ; though, to be sure, it has been very amusing to yourself, as well as the rest of the world, for, while you are laughing at your own conceits, you were at the same time sure they would cram your iron chests. What has put this fancy into my head was your desiring a good character of young Crofts. It is a sad thing, some people say, that such a paltry being as an exciseman cannot get his bread unless he has behaved well in the world ; and yet it is so perfectly right, that if everybody would have the same caution not to give good characters, nor receive people into your family for servants, or any kind of business, who had them not,—if this was made an unalterable rule, the world must in time become all good sort of people. I send the enclosed [presumably a testimonial], which may be depended on. Mr. Costard is our rector, one of the most learned and best of men in the world: they say he has more knowledge in the stars, and amongst all the sky-people, than anybody, so that most of us take him for a conjuror. . . . '

If young Crofts did not get his Excisemanship after that, then there is no virtue in the most skilful mixture of acute nonsense and 'soft soap.' In January 1776 it was reported that the English Roscius contemplated retiring from the stage; and Kitty then wrote him a long letter, which was endorsed by the recipient: 'My Pivy, excel-

lent!’ and of which the following are the most material parts:—

‘Is it really true that you have put an end to the glory of Drury Lane theatre? *if it is so* let me congratulate my dear Mr. and Mrs. Garrick on their approaching happiness. I know what it will be; you cannot yet have an idea of it; *but* if you should still be so wicked not to be satisfied with that *unbounded*, uncommon degree of fame you have received as an actor, and which no other actor ever did receive—nor no other actor ever *can* receive—I say, if you should still long to be dipping your fingers in their theatrical pudding (now without plums), you will be no Garrick for the Pivy. . . .’

Then, after a long eulogy of him on account of things which she knew of, she says, though the public did not, the letter proceeds:—

‘While I was under your control I did not say half the fine things I thought of you, because it looked like flattery; and you know your Pivy was always proud: besides, I thought you did not like me then; but *now* I am sure you do, which makes me send you this letter. What a strange jumble of people they have put in the papers as the purchasers of the patent! I thought I should have died with laughing when I saw a man-midwife amongst them: I suppose they have taken him to prevent *miscarriages*! . . .’

And this fine friendly letter ends with a fine, friendly (and also diplomatic) appeal on behalf of Miss Pope, who, from her first coming out had been a favourite of Kitty’s, and who was then disengaged in consequence of a dispute with the Drury Lane managers about salary:—

‘Now let me say one word about my poor, unfortunate friend Miss Pope. I know how much she disobliged you; and if I had been in your place I believe I should have acted just as you did. But by this time I hope you have forgot your resentment, and will look upon her late behaviour as having been taken with a dreadful fit of vanity, which for that time took her senses from her, and having been tutored by an affected beast, who helped to

turn her head ; but pray recollect her in the other light, a faithful creature to you, on whom you could always depend, certainly a good actress, amiable in her character, both in her being a very modest woman, and very good to her family ; and to my certain knowledge, has the greatest regard for you. Now, my dear Mr. Garrick, I hope it is not yet too late to re-instate her before you quit your affairs there ; I beg it, I entreat it ; I shall look upon it as the greatest favour you can confer on—Your ever obliged friend,
‘C. CLIVE.’

Miss Pope was re-instated ; and a month or so later Kitty writes : ‘I suppose you have had a long letter of thanks from Miss Pope. I have had one from her all over transport. I feel vast happiness about that affair, and shall ever remember it as a great obligation you have conferred on your Pivy Clive.’ The letter from which the following passage is extracted was endorsed by Garrick—‘Pivy’s letter about Miss More’—Hannah More being meant. It was headed by the writer with two lines of verse which, if not a specimen of original composition, are at any rate a fearful and wonderful specimen of original spelling :—

‘O Jealousey, thou raiging pain
Where shall I find my piece againe.’

After this, the letter goes on—

‘I am in a great fuss. Pray what is the meaning of a quarter of a hundred of the Miss Moors purring about you with their poems, and plays, and romancies ; what, is the Pivy to be roused, and I don’t understand it. Mrs. Garrick has been so good to say she would spare me a little corner of your heart, and I can tell the Miss Moors they shall not have one morsel of it. *What!* do they pretend to take it by *force of lines*. If that’s the case, I shall write such verses as shall make them stare againe, and send them to Bristol with a flea in their ear! . . .’

Two years later, she found occasion to expostulate with him for his neglect of her. Dating from Twickenham, the 22nd of March 1778, she writes :—

‘There is no such being now in the world as *Pivy*; she has been killed by the cruelty of the *Garrick*; but the Clive (thank *God*) is still alive, and alive like to be, and did intend to call you to a severe account for your wicked behaviour to her; but having been told of your good deeds, and great achievements, I concluded you was in too much conceit with yourself to listen to my complaints; and would pay no more regard to my remonstrances than the King does to my Lord Mayor’s, and therefore the best thing I could do would be to change my anger into compliment and congratulations. . . . The country is very dull; we have not twenty people in the village; but still it is better than London. . . .’

This put Garrick on his mettle; and he answered, dating from his house at Hampton, in the following very pretty strain:—

‘MY DEAR PIVY,—Had not the nasty bile, which so often confines me, and has heretofore tormented you, kept me at home, I should have been at your feet three days ago. If your heart (somewhat combustible like my own) has played off all the squibs and rockets which lately occasioned a little cracking and bouncing about me, and can receive again the more gentle and pleasing firework of love and friendship, I shall be with you at six this evening, to revive, by the help of those spirits in your tea-kettle lamp, that flame which was almost blown out by the flouncing of your petticoat when my name was mentioned.

‘Tea is a sovereign balm for wounded love.’ Will you permit me to try the poet’s recipe this evening? Can my Pivy know so little of me to think that I prefer the clack of Lords and Ladies to the enjoyment of humour and genius? I reverence most sincerely your friend and neighbour [Horace Walpole], not because he is the son of one of the first of first ministers, but because he is himself one of first ministers of literature. In short, your misconception about that fatal *champatra* (the devil take the word!) has made me so cross about everything that belongs to it, that I curse all squibs, crackers, rockets, air-balloons, mines, serpents, and Catherine-wheels, and can think of nothing and wish for nothing, but laugh, gig, humour, fun, pun, conundrum, carriwicheet, and Catherine Clive! I am ever, my Pivy’s most constant and loving,

‘DAVID GARRICK.

‘My wife sends her love, and will attend the ceremony this evening.’

One of Kitty's neighbours at Twickenham was Dr. Johnson's 'unclubbable' friend, Sir John Hawkins; and when Sir John's daughter, that rather tart old maid Laetitia, put together some of her reminiscences in 1822, she had a few, not over friendly, remarks to make about Mrs. Clive, whose memory, she says, still survived in the place, and who, 'I believe by her agreeable, or rather diverting society, paid rent for what is called Little Strawberry Hill.' Miss Hawkins notes it as a virtue which, she thinks, on account of Mrs. Clive's manners in private, and cast of characters in public, will perhaps not be readily credited to her, that she practised total abstinence from all spirituous liquors. She once boasted to a neighbour, it appears, that she could say more than most players, namely, that she had never kept any of those exhilarating resources in her house. Miss Hawkins also records that when Mrs. Clive called at their house one day, and her mother ran out to the carriage to say that the small-pox had broken out in the family, the latter lady was much offended because the former seemed to have no appreciation of such a delicate attention, and merely remarked: 'It was not you I wanted to see; it was your husband; send him out.' Another reply, more forcible than polite, is recorded to have been made to 'two very decent and respectful men then in office as surveyors of the roads in the parish,' who were sent to Mrs. Clive by Sir John Hawkins, the acting magistrate of the place, to demand payment of certain rates. She bluntly said—'By the living God, I will not pay it.' This was probably in December 1773, when from a letter of Walpole's to Lord Nuneham it appears that Kitty was altogether 'on the rampage'; for Horace remarks:—

'Except being extremely ill, Mrs. Clive is extremely well; but the tax-gatherer is gone off, and she must pay her window-lights over again; and the road before her door is very bad, and the parish won't mend it, and there is some suspicion that Garrick is

at the bottom of it. . . . The papers said she was to act at Covent Garden, and she has printed a very proper answer in the *Evening Post*.'

The only intelligence of her after this date is what can be gleaned from Walpole's letters. Sometimes he records a joke against her, as in the remark: 'My Lady Townshend, in the days of her wit, said that Mrs. Clive's face rose on Strawberry Hill and made it sultry; but I assure you, you may sit now in her beams when she is in her zenith without being tanned.' Sometimes it is a good thing of her own; as:—

'My Lady Shelburne has taken a house here, and it has produced a *bon mot* from Mrs. Clive. You know my Lady Suffolk is *deaf*, and I have talked much of a charming old passion [Madame du Deffand] I have at Paris, who is *blind*. "Well," said the Clive, "if the new Countess is but *lame*, I shall have no chance of ever seeing you!"'

In 1778 he chronicles that 'poor Mrs. Clive has been robbed again in her own lane, as she was last year, and got the jaundice, she thinks, with the fright.' He never makes a visit, he remarks, without a blunderbuss; and, indeed, something of the kind seems to have been very necessary, for he reports further highway robberies, and once that Mrs. Clive's house was burgled. In the summer of 1782 she had an illness, and seemed in a very declining condition; but by the autumn he reports her as really recovered, and partaking of the diversions of the 'Carnival,' which at Twickenham commenced at Michaelmas, and lasted as long as there were four persons left to make a pool. In September he writes:—

'Nobody dares stir out of their own house. We are robbed and murdered if we do but step over the threshold to the chandler's shop for a pennyworth of plums. . . . Dame Clive is the only heroine amongst all us old dowagers: she is so much recovered that she ventures to go out cruising on all the neighbours, and has made a miraculous draught of fishes': i.e., a great haul at cards.

She occasionally had some of her old theatrical friends to visit her. Once when Quin came to stay a few days, and had walked round to inspect her garden, she asked him if he had seen her pond—which must have been a very diminutive piece of water. ‘Yes, Kate,’ said he, ‘I have seen your *basin*, but did not see a wash-ball.’ Her protégée, Miss Pope, was a frequent visitor, usually spending a month with her during the summer recess. She told Horace Smith that Horace Walpole often came to drink tea with them in Mrs. Clive’s cottage, and that he *could* be very pleasant. ‘In what way?’ asked Smith; and Miss Pope ingenuously replied: ‘Oh, very snarling and sarcastic.’ Sarcastic he may have been; but in all his correspondence there is no trace of anything resembling a snarl at Kitty Clive. On December 14, 1785, eight days after her death, he wrote from his house in Berkeley Square to Lady Broome:—

‘My poor old friend is a great loss; but it did not much surprise me. I had played at cards with her at Mrs. Gostling’s three nights before I came to town, and found her extremely confused, and not knowing what she did: indeed I perceived something of the sort before, and had found her much broken this autumn. It seems that the day after I saw her she went to General Lister’s burial, and got cold, and had been ill for two or three days. On the Wednesday morning she rose to have her bed made, and while sitting on the bed, with her maid by her, sunk down at once, and died without a pang or a groan.’

After her death, Walpole set up an urn in the garden of Little Strawberry Hill, with the following inscription to her memory:—

‘Ye smiles and jests still hover round;
This is Mirth’s consecrated ground.
Here lived the laughter-loving dame,
A matchless actress, Clive her name.
The Comic Muse with her retired,
And shed a tear when she expired.’

She was buried in the old church at Twickenham, on the

outside wall of which Miss Pope set up a plain tablet to her memory.

Although the Comic Muse did not permanently retire with Mrs. Clive, she has, perhaps, in her peculiar walk, never been rivalled. And she appears to have been almost as entertaining off the stage as on. Her want of culture has sometimes been commented on. But she had what is far superior to ordinary culture, namely, a vigorous and original genius. Dr. Johnson said of her: 'Clive, sir, is a good thing to sit by, she always understands what you say.' And she said of him: 'I love to sit by Dr. Johnson, he always entertains me.' But though good to sit by occasionally, she was probably by no means an easy person to live with — as we may presume that very learned and intelligent man, George Clive, barrister, soon found out. But Tate Wilkinson vouches for her unostentatious generosity; and Henry Fielding declared that her sense of honour, good-nature, and good sense, joined to the most entertaining humour, begot, in him at any rate, the sincerest friendship.

MARGARET WOFFINGTON

THE name of Peg Woffington is better known to the modern reader than that of any other eighteenth century actress: whether her character be equally well known is altogether another matter. The familiarity of the name is due to that admirable novelist, Charles Reade, who in 1852 not only took this beautiful actress for the heroine of one of his popular stories, but also took her name for the title of the book. The historical novelist is usually allowed—or, at any rate, usually allows himself—considerable licence as regards dates, events, and even characters. And, so long as the reader understands that the work is to be taken as mere fiction, that does not very much matter. But in the case of Peg Woffington, Charles Reade went somewhat further. He believed that his heroine had been ‘falsely summed up,’ and put forth his novel as a vindication of her character, solemnly dedicating it, as such, to her memory. It is a capital illustration of the power of fiction to overlay truth. In 1760, shortly after her death, there appeared a little book of sixty pages, entitled *Memoirs of the Celebrated Mrs. Woffington*, which, though by no means free from faults and mistakes, was evidently well received by a public which knew the lady, for it passed into a second edition within the year. For a hundred and twenty-four years after this nobody had the courage to attempt another biography of such a person. But in 1884 Mr. Fitzgerald Molloy published a fanciful and fictitious, though professedly biographical work, entitled *The Life and Adventures of Peg Woffington*, which



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was evidently inspired and dominated by Charles Reade's misconception of her character. And four years later Mr. Augustin Daly of New York, powerfully acted upon by the same influence, produced and printed for private circulation a sumptuous and splendidly illustrated biography of the fascinating lady, which the *Dictionary of National Biography* laments is 'unfortunately inaccessible to the general public.' Mr. Molloy's book may be put aside without further examination, on the ground that one hardly knows whether it is intended as a romantic biography or a biographical romance. But with regard to the representations of Charles Reade and Augustin Daly, an examination of all the extant contemporary records plainly shows that the first must have, Pygmalion-like, fallen in love with his own creation, which he afterwards imagined to be the real person; and that the second was driven to sift and winnow and alter the evidence in order to fashion the real woman into the likeness of the novelist's heroine.

Margaret Woffington is said to have been born in Dublin, in 1720 according to the inscription on her tombstone at Teddington; in 1718 according to Mr. Daly; and probably four or five years earlier, according to the *Dictionary of National Biography*. From the *Memoir* of her published in 1760 (on which, little as one might think it, all subsequent notices are founded), we learn that her father was a journeyman bricklayer, honest and sober, but desperately poor, and with so strong a prejudice against the medical profession that when he fell ill of a fever he refused to have a doctor. He was getting better without medical aid when his wife, seeing a physician passing the door in his gilded coach, called the learned man in to relieve her own anxiety. He assured her that her husband was progressing favourably and would be quite well in the course of a few days; but after a few days of the doctor's treatment poor Woffington

died. He was buried by the parish, and left his widow with two children and encumbered with debt. For a time the mother supported herself and her children by taking in washing. Then, presumably by the aid of friends, she was enabled to open a huckster's shop on Ormonde Quay; but this soon failed; and she took to hawking fruit and water-cress about the streets. Lee Lewes says in his *Memoirs* that for some years she earned a scanty livelihood for herself and two daughters in this way, 'with the youngest (afterwards the Hon. Mrs. Cholmondeley) on her breast, and Peggy, the charming, lovely Peggy, trotting by her side.'

'I have met with more than one in Dublin who assured me that they remembered to have seen the lovely Peggy, with a little dish upon her hand, and without shoes to cover her delicate feet, crying through College Green, Dame Street, and other parts of the town, "All this fine young sallad for a halfpenny—all for a halfpenny—all a halfpenny here!"'

In 1727, according to Hitchcock's *Historical View of the Irish Stage*, Madame Violante, a capital dancer, rented a large house, with a spacious garden, in Fowne's Court, which she converted into a commodious booth, and brought over a company of tumblers and rope-dancers, who exhibited there for some time with success. When the public tired of her tumblers, she converted the booth into a play-house, and performed both plays and operas. And when her actors proved a bad and unattractive lot, Madame Violante, who was a woman of many resources, formed a company of children, all under ten years of age, who became known as the Lilliputian Troupe. Amongst other things, they performed *The Beggar's Opera*, which had not previously been seen in Dublin, and which drew crowded houses. Many of these children, says Hitchcock, afterwards became actors and actresses of distinction, but the most distinguished of them all was Peg Woffington, who in *The Beggar's Opera* played

the part of Polly. In 1730 Madame Violante removed to more commodious premises in George's Lane, with her Lilliputian troupe in great estimation. Lee Lewes tells us that Madame Violante perceived the bent of Margaret's genius, and instructed her in several other ballad-farcical parts; and that Mr. Charles Coffey, author of *The Beggar's Wedding*, and other humorous poems, took much notice of her, and carefully taught her every applauded stroke he had noticed in the performance by Miss Raftor (afterwards Mrs. Clive) of the part of Nell in *The Devil to Pay*. Coffey then recommended her strongly to Thomas Elrington, manager of the Aungier Street Theatre, where she was at first employed to dance between the acts; and then, according to Lee Lewes, notwithstanding her extreme youth, was put on for womanly characters, such as Mrs. Peachum, Mother Midnight in the *Twin Rivals*, and other parts which required humour in the performance of them. Hitchcock says that Ophelia in *Hamlet* was her first speaking part on that stage, which she acted in February 1736-7; and that she first attracted much notice as an actress in the winter of 1739. She then, he says,

'began to unveil those beauties, and display those graces and accomplishments which for so many years afterwards charmed mankind. Her ease, elegance, and simplicity, as Polly in *The Beggar's Opera*, with the natural manner of her singing the songs, pleased much. Her girls were esteemed excellent, and her Miss Lucy in *The Virgin Unmasked* brought houses. But she never displayed herself to more advantage than in characters where she assumed the other sex. Her figure, which was a model of perfection, then free from restraints, appeared in its natural form. One of the first occasions she had to exhibit it was at her own benefit, when she played Phillis in *The Conscious Lovers*, and the Female Officer, in a farce of that name, with great reputation.'

In April 1740, being already held in high estimation, she appeared for the first time as Sir Harry Wildair in Far-

quhar's *Constant Couple*, 'by desire of several persons of quality,' when she charmed the town to an uncommon degree. One enthusiastic poet broke out into verse in the following strain :—

‘That excellent Peg !
Who showed such a leg
When lately she dressed in men's clothes—
A creature uncommon,
Who's both man and woman,
The chief of the belles and the beaux !’

Her beauty was extolled on all hands; but the only detailed description of her is the following by the author of the *Memoirs* of 1760 :—

‘Her eyes were black as jet, and while they beamed with ineffable lustre, at the same time revealed all the sentiments of her heart, and showed that native good sense . . . resided in their fair possessor. Her eyebrows were full and arched, and had a peculiar property of inspiring love or striking terror. . . . Her cheeks were vermillioned with Nature's best rouge . . . and outvied all the laboured works of art. Her nose was somewhat of the aquiline, and gave her a look full of majesty and dignity. Her lips were of the colour of coral, and softness of down; and her mouth displayed such beauties as would thaw the very bosom of an anchorite. . . . Her teeth were white and even. . . . Her hair was of a bright auburn colour. . . . Her whole form was beauteous to excess.’

Hitchcock, writing as the historian of the Irish stage, has nothing to say about the private lives of the players. But the author of the little *Memoirs* of 1760 tells us that although Peg received a salary of thirty shillings a week, which was then considered high pay, she was not content with this, and adopted other methods of adding to her income. An infatuated swain swore that if she did not return his love he would hang, drown, or shoot himself; and in order not to be responsible for such a suicide she consented to live with him for a time. Then there came along a gentleman with money, who purchased her love.

'A next presented and outbid the former. Another offered and she received him in her train. A fifth appeared and was well received. A sixth declared his suit, and his suit was not rejected. In a word, a multitude of love's votaries paid their adorations to the shrine of their fair saint, and their fair saint was not cruel.'

The last to present himself (in Dublin) was 'the famous T——d T——fe,' who drove all the others away. It was with this lover that she left Dublin for London. But she had not been long in the English capital before she began to hanker after the plaudits of the stage, and her lover, who seems by this time to have had a matrimonial project in view, readily consented to her seeking a London engagement. But she had to make nineteen visits to manager Rich, of Covent Garden, before she succeeded in obtaining an interview. We are told that on the nineteenth occasion she told the footman in disgust that her name was Woffington, but that she would wait on his master no more. On hearing her name for the first time, the footman asked her to wait one moment, darted away as quick as lightning, and before she had recovered from her surprise at his altered manner, re-appeared with a message that his master would be glad to see her. Rich was an eccentric person, who talked in a provincial dialect; and Peggy found him sitting on a couch with one leg lolling over the other, his left hand holding a play-book, and his right a cup of tea, while round, upon, and about him were no less than seven-and-twenty cats of various sizes and colours. He is said to have addressed her in the following terms:—

'I have hard of you, Madam, and though I am in no grate want of Hands, yet as you are so sharming a figure, and so handsome a parson, I would oblige you for all that. But I am afraid notwithstanding you took on the Irish stage, you are not larned enough for mine. Larning is a fine thing, and I have hard you have it nat; yet perhaps, with some of my help in private, you may do very well.'

He then went on to discourse at an interminable length about his various cats; but the result of the interview was that she obtained an engagement with him for the ensuing season. Her first appearance on the stage of Covent Garden was on the 6th of November 1740, when, as Silvia in *The Recruiting Officer*, she at once took the town by storm. She was announced for the 21st of the same month as Sir Harry Wildair, and the novelty of the attempt by a woman aroused the interest of all the dramatic connoisseurs. The standard for acting this character was Wilkes, and every actor who had attempted it since him had fallen very far short of success. It was reserved for Mrs. Woffington, says Hitchcock, to exhibit this elegant portrait of the young man of fashion 'in a style perhaps beyond the author's warmest ideas.' The house was crowded, and she so infinitely surpassed all expectations that her performance was received with a degree of applause beyond anything that had ever been known. Her Sir Harry Wildair became the subject of conversation in every polite circle; it was repeated twenty nights during the season, drawing every night a crowded and brilliant audience, and it established her reputation as an actress of the first rank.

It was about this time, apparently, that she performed a little exploit, the story of which is related both by Charles Reade and Augustin Daly, but which from both of them receives a significant alteration. Charles Reade makes his Peg Woffington herself relate that she was courted by a young gentleman, promised to marry him, and looked forward with tranquil happiness to the day when she should be a wife in a chimney-corner, darning stockings for a large family of her own; but that she suddenly became suspicious, had the young man watched and discovered that he was going to marry another woman and break the news

to her by degrees afterwards. Mr. Daly (who, for some reason which he does not condescend to give, dates the event in 1738) says that she was engaged to be married to a young gentleman of good family, whose father insisted on his marrying an heiress. But the anonymous author of the *Memoirs* of 1760, from whom both of them take the story, tells of something very different from a respectable engagement to be married. What he says is that after Peg came to London with T——d T——fe, that man of pleasure might perhaps have been satisfied with her if she had remained faithful to him, but that ‘such a vast number of young and old rakes offered themselves to our heroine, and such a vast number were accepted,’ that it was by no means to be wondered at that he made overtures of marriage to another woman. But when Peg discovered that he had done this, she determined to break off the match. Hearing that a masked ball was to be given in honour of the birthday of the lady, the revengeful actress gained admittance to it in man’s attire, became the partner of the bride elect in a minuet, and took that opportunity to make such vile aspersions on the character of her lover that the young lady fainted, and the company broke up in confusion. Whether she succeeded in breaking off the match is not stated, but we are told that she succeeded in making T——d T——fe so furious that he refused to have anything more to do with *her*, and that she consequently lost the liberal allowance which he had continued to make her up to that date. This same writer (who is drawn upon for all he is worth whenever he says anything to Peg Woffington’s credit) goes on to observe that ‘our heroine’s abandoned life and vicious disposition were notorious to every one,’ and that even Phryne, Thais, and Messalina seemed pygmies by comparison.

In 1741 she transferred herself to Drury Lane, and

during that and the following season, gained increasing popularity in a variety of parts, but especially in Lady Brute in *The Provoked Wife*, Mrs. Sullen in *The Beaux' Stratagem*, Berinthia in *The Relapse*, Belinda in *The Man of the Mode*, and Lady Betty Modish in *The Careless Husband*, as well as in two or three Shakespearean parts, such as Nerissa in *The Merchant of Venice*, Helena in *All's Well that Ends Well*, and Rosalind in *As You Like It*. The chorus of praise was almost unanimous; but in October 1741 we find Horace Walpole writing to Sir Horace Mann: 'I have been two or three times at the play, very unwillingly, for nothing was ever so bad as the actors, except the company. There is much in vogue a Mrs. Woffington, a bad actress; but she has life.' And a year previously, Conway had written to Walpole, in reply, presumably, to some similar depreciating remark, 'So you cannot bear Woffington; yet all the town is in love with her. To say the truth, I am glad to find somebody to keep me in countenance, for I think she is an impudent Irish-faced girl.'

In the summer of 1742, Garrick and Mrs. Woffington were engaged by Duval of Smock Alley Theatre, Dublin, in order to rival the attraction of Quin and Mrs. Cibber who were playing at Aungier Street. Davies says that Garrick's acquaintance with Peg Woffington began in Ireland when he paid his first visit to that country in the summer of this year. But she had already played with Garrick in London, and his other biographer, Murphy, says that Garrick now travelled to Ireland in company with her. However that may be, they certainly rivalled the attraction of Quin and Mrs. Cibber at the other theatre, for, from the middle of June to the middle of August, Smock Alley Theatre was so crowded that an epidemic distemper which accompanied the excessive heat

of that summer proved fatal to a large number of the play-goers, and became known as 'the Garrick fever.' But though Garrick's success, as Hitchcock says, 'exceeded all imagination,' Woffington was nearly as great a favourite, and the lucky pair returned to London highly satisfied both with the reputation and the profit they had earned. And they appear to have been not only highly satisfied with themselves, but also with one another, for they returned to London as declared lovers. Daly says that whatever of love there may have been between them in Ireland was prudently concealed. There was also some concealment for a time after their return. Mrs. Woffington had apartments in Macklin's house in Bow Street, where Garrick became a constant visitor. But she had other visitors also, and in particular a certain deeply enamoured, and apparently jealous, noble lord. One night, as one of Macklin's biographers informs us, Garrick was in Mrs. Woffington's chamber when his lordship unexpectedly called. The actor, who would have got into trouble as well as the actress if discovered, jumped out of bed as soon as he heard the loud knocking at the door, snatched up his clothes, and hurried off into Macklin's room for security. What was his alarm, however, when he found that in the scramble he had left his wig behind! Of course, this unfortunate wig got entangled in his lordship's feet as soon as he entered the room, and when he saw what it was, he exclaimed, 'Oh, Madam, so I have found you out at last,' and went on to upbraid her in terms of rage and jealousy. She listened quite calmly; and then, without attempting any excuse, begged that he would not make himself such a fool, but give back her wig without more ado. 'What! Madam,' said he, 'do you glory in your infidelity? Do you own the wig, then?'—'Yes, certainly I do. I'm sure it was my

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money paid for it; and I hope it will repay me with money and reputation too.' This called for further explanation and at length she coolly told him that if he must needs be prying into all the particulars of her domestic and professional business, he must know that she was soon to play a breeches part, and the wig which he held in his hand was one she had been practising in just before she went to bed; and because her maid had been careless enough to leave it lying about; it was absurd for him to scold her as though she were a common prostitute. His lordship then begged a thousand pardons; and amity was restored. Garrick heard these particulars with transport on the following morning, and not only praised her wit and ingenuity, but, 'what was still better, sir,' said Macklin, 'gave us a dinner the same day at Richmond, where we all laughed heartily at his lordship's gullibility.'

A lively song entitled 'Lovely Peggy,' which appeared about this time and had some vogue, was then (and by Mr. Daly still is) attributed to Garrick. There are several stanzas of it, in the following strain:—

I.

'Once more I'll tune the vocal shell,
To hills and dales my passion tell,
A flame which time can never quell,
That burns for lovely Peggy.
Ye greater bards the lyre should hit,
To say what subject is more fit,
Than to record the sparkling wit
And bloom of lovely Peggy.'

II.

The sun first rising in the morn,
That paints the dew-bespangled thorn,
Does not so much the day adorn
As does my lovely Peggy.
And when in Thetis' lap of rest,
He streaks with gold the ruddy west,
He's not so beauteous, as undress'd
Appears my lovely Peggy.'

But, although Garrick did address some verses to her, these were the composition of Sir Charles Hanbury Williams. In a note to the song, in Hanbury Williams's collected works, Horace Walpole says that 'Sir Charles was in love with Mrs. Woffington; but she was in love with Garrick. One day, when Sir Charles taxed her with having been with the actor, though she had promised to see him no more, she vowed she had not seen him for ages. 'Nay,' said Sir Charles, 'I know you saw him yesterday.' 'Well,' replied she, 'and is not that an age?' The second volume of Hanbury Williams's works contains a number of copies of verses which he composed on Mrs. Woffington at various times, some of which show plainly enough that he was under no illusions as to her character, but which are too explicit for quotation. The following specimen of this gentleman's curiously cynical love poetry may perhaps be allowed.

'Though Peggy's charms have oft been sung,
The darling theme of every tongue,
New praises still remain ;
Beauty like hers may well infuse
New flights, new fancies, like a Muse,
And brighten every strain.

'Tis not her form alone I prize,
Which every fool that has his eyes,
As well as I can see ;
To say she's fair is but to say,
When the sun shines at noon, 'tis day—
Which none need learn of me.

But I'm in love with Peggy's mind,
Where every virtue is combin'd,
That can adorn the fair,
Excepting one you scarce can miss,
So trifling that you would not wish
That virtue had been there.

She who possesses all the rest,
Must sure excel the prude whose breast

That virtue shares alone ;
 To seek perfection is a jest :
 They who have fewest faults are best ;
 And Peggy has but one.'

After a while, however, the connection between Mrs. Woffington and Garrick became closer. She removed from Macklin's house, and lived with her lover in Southampton Street, Strand. Murphy says that the connection was known to and approved of by the public. They adopted a curious method of housekeeping, each bearing the monthly expenses alternately. Macklin frequently made one at their social board, which was also occasionally attended by some of the first wits of the time, particularly when it was Peggy's month to be responsible for the housekeeping, for there was always then a better table and a greater run of good company. When Macklin was asked how this happened, he would reply, in his rough, cynical manner: '*Happen?* sir, it did not happen at all—it was by *design*, by a studied economy on the part of Garrick, which more or less attended him all through life. Some confirmation of this peculiarity is given by Dr. Johnson, for Boswell reports him as saying one day in 1788, à propos of a remark about Garrick's parsimony: 'I remember drinking tea with him long ago, when Peg Woffington made it, and he grumbled at her for making it too strong: "Why," said Garrick, "it is as red as blood."' This peculiar arrangement appears to have lasted for two or three years. What encouragement Garrick gave her for the hope of marriage we do not know; but it was Macklin's opinion that she reckoned on it as a strong probability. According to Murphy, Garrick even went so far as to buy the wedding ring, and try it on her finger. Murphy—like Daly after him—seems to have thought that she would have been a very suitable wife for Garrick. He describes her as—
 'in the bloom of youth, possessed of a fine figure, great beauty,

and every elegant accomplishment. Her understanding was superior to the generality of her sex. Forgive her one female error, and it might fairly be said of her that she was adorned with every virtue: honour, truth, benevolence, and charity, were her distinguishing qualities. Her conversation was in a style of elegance always pleasing, and often instructive. She abounded in wit, but not of that wild sort which breakes out in sudden flashes, often troublesome and impertinent. Her judgment restrained her within due bounds.'

Unfortunately the one 'female error' with which Murphy debits her is the hardest of all to forgive; and Garrick may well have pondered, once, twice, and thrice, before binding himself for life to one who had shown herself so incontinent and inconstant, and who was, moreover, not ashamed to own it. We are told that one night when playing Sir Harry Wildair, after finishing a scene with a prodigious thunder of applause, she ran into the green-room, elate with joy, and found Quin sitting there. 'Mr. Quin,' said she, 'I have played this part so often that half the town believe me to be a real man.' Quin, in his rough style, made answer: 'Madam, the other half know you to be a woman.' Mrs. Woffington was not only not offended at his freedom, but would afterwards frequently relate the story, with hearty laughter at Quin's saturnine humour. Even during the time when Garrick and she were living together in Southampton Street, and when she is said to have expected that he would marry her, she carried on other gallantries; and it is a highly curious circumstance that the only piece of her handwriting which has been preserved relates to some such transaction during that time. The letter, which is dated November 19, 1743, runs as follows:—

'My Pretty little Oroonoko,—I'm glad to hear of y^r safe arrival in Sussex and that you are so well placed in the noble family of Richmond, &c., for whom I have y^e most profound regard and respect. Sir Thomas Robinson writes me word y^t you are very

pretty which has raised my curiosity to a great pitch and it makes me long to see you.

‘I hear the acting-poetaster is wth you still at Goodwood & has had the insolence to brag of favours from me—vain coxcomb! I did indeed by the persuasion of Mr. Swiney and his assistance answer the simpleton’s nauseous letter—foh!

‘He did well, truly, to throw my letter into the fire, otherwise it must have made him appear more ridiculous than his amour at Bath did or his cudgel-playing with y^e rough Irishman. Saucy Jackanapes! To give it for a reason for ye burning of my letter that there were expressions in it too passionate & tender to be shewn.

‘I did in an ironical way (which the booby took in a literal sense) compliment both myself and him on the succe^{sse} we shared mutually on his first appearance on y^e stage and that which he had (all to himself) in the part of Carlos in *Love Makes a Man*, when with an undaunted modesty he withstood the attack of his foes arm^d with catt-calls & other offensive weapons.

‘I did indeed give him a little double-meaning touch on the expression & graceful motion of his hands & arms as assistants to his energetic way of delivering y^e poets sentim^{ts} & which he must have learned from y^e youthful manner of spreading plaisters when he was apprentice.

‘There, these I say were the true motives to his burning y^e lett^r and no passionate expressions of mine.

‘I play ye part of Sir Harry Wildair to-night, and can’t recollect w^t I said to y^e impertinent monster in my lett^r, nor have I time to say any more now, but you shall hear from me by the next post; and if Swiney has a copy of it, or I can recover the chief articles in it, you shall have ’em.—I am (My D^r Black Boy) with my duty to their Graces y^r admirer & humble Serv^t,

‘MARGARET WOFFINGTON.’

Daly quotes this as a refutation of certain false reports which were circulated to her disadvantage; but, on the face of it, it looks much more like an artful excuse to one favoured lover for a compromising correspondence with another; and the story of Garrick’s wig shows how ingenious she could be in this way when necessity arose. Be this as it may, however, the tender connection with Garrick came

to an ignominious end. Macklin's biographer, Cooke, gives the following account of their parting:—

'After one of those *tête-à-têtes* when, we suppose, like Lucy in the *Beggar's Opera*, she was soliciting him to be made an honest woman of, the prospect of such a marriage haunted him so in his dreams that he had a very restless night of it. She inquired the cause: he demurred and hesitated for some time; but as the lady would take no excuse, he confusedly told her that he was thinking of this marriage, that it was a very foolish thing for both parties, who might do better in separate lines; and that for his part, though he loved and respected his Peggy, and ever should do so as an admirer, yet he could not answer for himself as a Benedick. "And pray was it this," said the lady, very coolly, "which has given you this restless night?" "Why, to tell you the truth, my dear Peg, as you love frankness, it was; and in consequence I have worn the shirt of Dejanira for these eight hours past." "Then, sir," said she, raising her voice, "get up and throw it off; for from this hour I separate myself from you, except in the course of professional business, or in the presence of a third person." Garrick attempted to soothe her, but in vain.'

The story got abroad, with exaggerations, and there were caricatures of the scene in the print shops. Macklin's biographer adds another little touch to show Garrick's characteristic meanness, even in his love affairs. Next morning, we are told, Peggy packed up all the little presents which Garrick had given her, and returned them. He did the same with her presents to him, with the exception of a pair of diamond shoe-buckles, which had cost her a considerable sum. She waited a month, and then wrote a letter delicately reminding him of these. He replied, saying that as these were the only *little* memorials he had of the many happy hours they had spent together, he hoped she would permit him to keep them for her sake.

When Garrick purchased a share of the Patent, and assumed the managership of Drury Lane, in conjunction with Lacy, in 1747, Mrs. Woffington's position became a some-

what awkward one; especially as he brought with him from Covent Garden Mrs. Cibber and Mrs. Pritchard, with whom there were bound to be disagreeable contentions for characters; to say nothing of Mrs. Clive, who, as Tate Wilkinson observes, was superior to fear, and was a constant thorn. As soon as her articles with Lacy expired, therefore, she transferred herself to Covent Garden; where she remained from 1749 to 1751. Then, in consequence, as Mrs. Bellamy asserts, of Quin's refusal to allow her an extra benefit which she had asked for, she shook the dust of Covent Garden from her feet, and set off in a pet for Dublin. She applied to Sheridan for an engagement. But although old Colley Cibber had transmitted glowing accounts of the surprising improvement of Mrs. Woffington, Victor says that 'that very happy, singular old gentleman' retained the airs of a lover when over seventy years of age, and his encomiums on the lady's perfections were attributed by the Dublin people to the excess of his passion. She probably asked more than Sheridan thought she was worth; but after some bargaining she was engaged at £400 for the season. Her reception, however, was such as surpassed the most sanguine expectations of her friends, and made the summer of 1751 a brilliant era in the history of Sheridan's theatre. Her success was not confined to any one particular line of acting. But the parts in which she peculiarly charmed the Irish people were Charlotte in Cibber's *Nonjuror*, Lady Townley, Hermione, and Sir Harry Wildair. Each of these very opposite characters, which it was difficult to say in which she most excelled, says Victor, she repeated ten nights, and the receipts of the theatre, on those nights alone, amounted to upwards of £4000, or an average of £100 a night; 'an instance never known at that time on the Irish Stage for four old stock plays.' In a letter to the Countess of Ossory in October of that year, Victor reports:—

‘Mrs. Woffington is the only theme in or out of the theatre, her performances are in general admirable. She appeared in *Lady Townly*, and since Mrs. Oldfield I have not seen a complete Lady Townly till that night,—and in *Andromache* her grief was dignified, and her deportment elegant—in *Jane Shore* nothing appeared remarkable but her superior figure—but in *Hermione* she discovered such talents as have not been displayed since Mrs. Porter.’

The newspapers were every day filled with panegyrics in prose and in verse, on her person, on her elegant deportment, and on her inimitable acting. A specimen of the latter, by ‘a gentleman of some eminence in the literary world,’ will perhaps be more welcome than a specimen of the prose:—

‘Explore the theatres, how very few
Express the passion which the poet drew ;
Mad with the love of praise, the actor tries
Like Bayes, to elevate and to surprise ;
And women oft, whose beauty charms alone,
Neglect the poet’s part to play their own ;
But you each character so close pursue,
We think the author copied it from you.

Hail then ! in whom united we behold
Whatever graced the theatres of old ;
A form above description, and a mind
By judgment temper’d, and by wit refin’d.
Cut off in beauty’s prime ! when Oldfield died,
The Muses wept, and threw their harps aside ;
But now resume the lyre, amaz’d to see
Her greatest beauties far outdone by thee.’

Sheridan was in ecstasies. He gave her double pay, £800 instead of £400, for the winter season, and then reaped a golden harvest from her astonishing attractiveness. She now lived in some splendour, keeping a handsome equipage and two footmen, and treating her friends to lavish entertainments. She had never sought the society of the other sex, says Mr. Daly, and she was not, ‘perhaps,’ received at Dublin Castle. This is a rather euphemistic way of putting

it. What Mr. Daly's authority, Thomas Davies, observed was :—

'She frankly declared that she preferred the company of men to that of women ; the latter, she said, talked of nothing but silks and scandal. Whether this particular preference of the conversation of males might not take its rise from her not being admitted to visit certain ladies of quality, I will not take upon me to say ; but she certainly had not the free access to women of rank and virtue which was permitted to Oldfield and Cibber.'

But she had what with a happy ambiguity is described as the 'singular honour' of being the only woman ever admitted at the meetings of the Beef-Steak Club, was elected President of that celebrated society, and, according to some authorities, always took her place in the chair dressed in male attire. And if the ladies of quality declined to receive her, they paid her what is proverbially the sincerest flattery, for she appears to have set the fashions in Dublin, as she had already done in London. She was not spoiled by her great success ; and, as Hitchcock remarks, it should be remembered to her honour that in the zenith of her glory—

'She remained the same gay, affable, obliging, good-natured Woffington to every one around her. She had none of those occasional illnesses which I have sometimes seen assumed by capital performers, to the great vexation and loss of the manager, and disappointment of the public : she always acted four times each week. Not the lowest performer in the theatre did she refuse playing for ; out of twenty-six benefits she acted in twenty-four.'

Some time in 1752 died Owen M'Swinny, a buffoon, who had formerly been one of the managers of Drury Lane, and afterwards Keeper of the King's Mews. He was one of Peg Woffington's numerous admirers ; and by his will he directed that a certain sum should be invested in Consols, and the interest of it, amounting to £200 a year, paid to her for life. But there was a certain condition attached to the bequest,

which, Victor tells us, caused a merry scandal in Dublin towards the end of the year.

‘When Christmas approached, as there are no plays in that week, the manager and Mrs. Woffington took a public journey together to his seat at Quilca, in the county of Cavan, about fifty miles from Dublin. This *tête-à-tête* party (as the manager left his wife behind) must create merriment in a place where the actions of remarkable persons are presently known, especially of players who are not very notorious for their chastity. As I was not in the secret, I wondered at this transaction, and the more, as I knew the manager’s private sentiments of that lady, which tallied with my own, viz., that she had captivating charms as a jovial, witty, bottle-companion, but very few remaining as a mere female. New stories were propagated every morning about this mysterious couple, and whimsical reports of Mrs. Sheridan’s raging fits of jealousy. But Mrs. Sheridan was not only in the secret, but being a lady of distinguished good sense, was at all times satisfied with the conduct of her husband. And now for the secret, which was very soon (as Scrub says) no secret at all. The manager, to show his extraordinary politeness to Mrs. Woffington, carried her down to Quilca to meet a worthy clergyman in his neighbourhood, who, from the wildness of his situation, is called the Primate of the Mountains. This reverend gentleman was to receive the recantation of this lady from the Romish religion to the Protestant. I say to receive it, and to perform the ceremony; because a motive more powerful than any arguments that could be used by the whole body of the clergy had already persuaded her to make the necessary change. An estate of £200 a year in Ireland had been lately left her by her friend and admirer, the famous Owen M’Swinny, Esquire, which she was put in possession of by virtue of that recantation.’

Her season of prosperity in Dublin lasted without any diminution until 1754, when there were riots in the theatre, due to the real or supposed interference of the Beef-Steak Club in political matters, concerning which party passion at that time ran very high; in consequence of which Sheridan closed the house, and advertised it to let; whereupon Peg Woffington returned to London.

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In October 1754, after an absence of three years, she reappeared at Covent Garden; and for the following three years was again one of the most prominent and popular of London actresses, both in comedy and in tragedy. Hitchcock comments on the remarkable circumstance that, unassisted by friends, and unimproved by any education other than she had picked up as she went along, Peg Woffington should have risen from so lowly and even squalid an origin and surroundings to 'a station so celebrated as to be able to set the fashions, prescribe laws to taste, and, beyond any of her time, present us with a lively picture of the easy, well-bred woman of fashion.' It is the mystery of genius, which modern men of science are no more able than the historian of the Irish stage to explain. Peg Woffington was a born artist, and she had likewise an infinite capacity for taking pains. Her natural bent was for the representation of women of high rank and dignified elegance. And her representation of the man of fashion, in Sir Harry Wildair, was esteemed of such surpassing excellence that no male actor ventured to assume the part so long as she remained on the stage. But she by no means confined herself to such parts. As Mrs. Day, in *The Committee*, for example, she 'made no scruple to disguise her beautiful countenance by drawing on it the lines of deformity and the wrinkles of old age, to put on the tawdry habiliments and vulgar manners of an old hypocritical woman.' Nor was this all. She aspired to a general excellence in her profession, and being aware of her comparative inferiority in tragedy, she visited Paris in order to take lessons from Mademoiselle Dumesnil, an actress celebrated for her natural elocution and dignified action. Unfortunately, as Victor politely puts it, 'her voice was not harmonised for the plaintive notes of sorrow.' There is a story that the first time she played Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, when Lorenzo said: 'This is the

voice, or I am much deceived, of Portia,' and she had to reply—'He knows me as the blind man knows the cuckoo, by her bad voice,' the whole audience laughed outright, and she, being perfectly conscious of her natural deficiency, joined in the general merriment. But Davies says that after her return from France, though she could never attain to that happy art of speaking, nor reach that skill of touching the passions, so justly admired in Cibber and Pritchard, yet she acted some tragic parts with much approbation, particularly Andromache, and Hermione in *The Distressed Mother*. And whatever may be said about the laxity of her private life, as a performer she was conscientious to a degree. Tate Wilkinson (who is an excellent witness to call in her favour, because she certainly did her best to blast his career at the outset) bears emphatic testimony that she often played without murmuring six nights in the week; that she was ever ready at the call of the audience; and that, although in possession of all the first line of characters, never thought it improper, or a degradation of her consequence, whenever it suited the interest of her manager, to play parts which (as old Tate found from frequent experience) were regarded as insults if offered to some ladies of far inferior pretensions. Such being her habitual practice, it was singular and unfortunate that when, on one solitary occasion, in consequence of a quarrel with Rich, she refused to come forward as a substitute for Mrs. Cibber, the audience, who thought (rightly enough) that most of Rich's company had been treating him badly, showed their sympathy for the manager by venting all their disapprobation on the comparatively innocent head of Peg Woffington. Tate Wilkinson thus describes what happened on her next appearance on the stage:—

'Whoever is living and saw her that night will own that they never beheld any figure half so beautiful since. Her anger gave a

glow to her complexion, and added lustre to her charming eyes. The audience treated her very rudely, bade her ask pardon, and threw orange peels on the stage. She behaved with great resolution, and treated their rudeness with glorious contempt. She left the stage; was called for; and with infinite persuasion was prevailed on to return. However, she did so, and walked forward to the footlights, and told them she was ready and willing to perform her character, if they chose to permit her—that the decision was theirs—on or off, just as they pleased—a matter of indifference to her. The ayes had it, and all went smoothly afterwards.’

Though Peg Woffington generally kept on very amicable terms with her managers, her hot temper and biting tongue caused frequent scenes in the green-room between her and some of the other performers. The mutual hatred which existed between her and Mrs. Clive has already been noticed in the preceding sketch; and an account of some of her contentions with Mrs. Bellamy will be found in the following one. Unfortunately none of Mrs. Clive’s sharp speeches nor of Woffington’s keen and sarcastic replies have been recorded. The solitary instance which Mr. Daly gives is not unimpeachably authentic. Kitty is said to have remarked to Peg, ‘A pretty face, of course, excuses a multiplicity of sweethearts’; and Peg to have replied to Kitty, ‘And a plain one insures a vast overflow of unmarketable virtue.’ With Quin she carried on a perpetual war of wit. In Reade’s novel, Quin always gets the worst of it; but in reality the reverse seems to have happened. His retort that if half the town believed her to be a man, the other half knew well enough to the contrary, has already been cited. A similar *mot* is credited to him at a later date, after she had been paying a visit to Bath, and, according to the *Memoirs* of 1760, indulging in a number of gallantries there and elsewhere. Quin inquired why she had been to Bath. She answered saucily, ‘Oh, for mere wantonness.’ Whereupon Quin drily asked, ‘And have you been cured of it?’

Tate Wilkinson, who had a fine talent for mimicry, gave her great offence by including her in a series of imitations which he gave when a mere lad of seventeen. He was very anxious to obtain an engagement at one of the London theatres, and with that object spent a good deal of his time hanging about behind the scenes. One day in 1756 an old military friend of his family took him to Covent Garden, where they occupied a prominent position in the stage-box. Mrs. Woffington, he says, had been told that he was remarkable for 'taking her off,' and in the course of her part she came close to the stage-box where he and his friend were sitting, and ended a speech with such a sarcastic sneer at him that it actually made him draw back in his chair. As ill luck would have it, at that very moment a woman in the balcony above called out something in a remarkably shrill voice which occasioned a general laugh; and Mrs. Woffington thought it to proceed from poor, trembling Tate. 'She again turned,' he relates, 'and darted her lovely eyes, though assisted by the furies, which made me look confounded and sheepish; all which only served to confirm my condemnation.' In the green-room, after the scene had ended, she enlarged on the young man's insolence in such a way as to make him the subject of general abuse. And the next morning, when he was attending the manager's levee, she passed through the room where he had long been kept wearily waiting, and—

'without a word, a curtsy, or a bow of the head, proceeded on to her sedan; from which she as haughtily returned, and advancing towards me with queen-like steps, and viewing me most contemptuously, said, "Mr. Wilkinson, I have made a visit this morning to Mr. Rich to command and insist on his not giving you any engagement whatever—no, not of the most menial kind in the theatre. Merit you have none,—charity you deserve not,—for if you did, my purse should give you a dinner—your impudence to me last night, where you had with such assurance placed yourself, is one proof of your ignorance; added to that, I heard you echo

my voice when I was acting, and I sincerely hope that in whatever barn you are suffered as an unworthy stroller, you will fully experience the same contempt you dared last night to offer me." With a flounce, and enraged features, without waiting, or permitting me to reply, she darted once more into her chair.'

Tate, however, still persevered in haunting the theatre; and one night, some few weeks after this, when she was playing Lady Dainty in *The Double Gallant*, he ventured to say to Mrs. Barrington, who was acting in the same piece, that he thought Mrs. Woffington looked very beautiful. Mrs. Barrington tossed her head, and told him that was no news, at which she and Mrs. Vincent laughed. This caused Mrs. Woffington to turn her head and condescendingly ask what they were laughing at. She was told that the young man had been saying that Lady Dainty looked beautiful that night, and had been informed that they were in no need of such information, as she always looked so; whereupon Mrs. Woffington, with a disdainful glance at him, scornfully said, 'Poor creature!' and Tate began to think that his only chance of earning his bread would indeed be acting in a barn—if, indeed, being held in such contempt, he might even aspire to that. But it was not long before he was fated to see the last public appearance of his beautiful foe.

On May the 17th, 1757, *As You Like It* was acted at Covent Garden for the combined benefit of three of the players. Tate Wilkinson, who had in the meantime made his début in the provinces, was standing near the wing as Mrs. Woffington, in the character of Rosalind, was going on the stage in the first act, and she spoke to him in passing.

'Mrs. Woffington ironically said she was glad to have that opportunity of congratulating me on my stage success; and did not doubt but such merit would insure me an engagement the following winter! I bowed, but made no answer. I knew her dislike to me, and was humiliated sufficiently, and needed not any slight to sink me lower. . . . She went through Rosalind for four acts without

my perceiving she was in the least disordered, but in the fifth she complained of great indisposition. I offered her my arm, the which she graciously accepted; I thought she looked softened in her behaviour, and had less of the *hauteur*. When she came off at the quick change of dress, she again complained of being ill, but got accoutred, and returned to finish the part, and pronounced in the epilogue speech—"If it be true that good wine needs no bush, it is as true that a good play needs no epilogue," etc. etc. But when arrived at—"If I were among you I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me," her voice broke, she faltered, endeavoured to go on, but could not proceed; then in a voice of tremor screamed: "O God! O God!" tottered to the stage-door, speechless, where she was caught. The audience, of course, applauded till she was out of sight, and then sunk into awful looks of astonishment . . . to see one of the most handsome women of the age, a favourite principal actress, who had for several seasons given high entertainment, struck so suddenly by the hand of Death, in such a situation of time and place, and in her prime of life.'

She was given over for dead that night, and for several days following; but she so far recovered as to linger on for another three years, though, as Tate reports, 'existing as a mere skeleton, "sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."' Wilkinson ungrudgingly praises both her beauty and her power as an actress. The circumstances he relates mostly belong as much to his own history as to hers. And he declares (writing more than thirty years afterwards), that he had no pique from what had happened so long ago; adding that if she favoured him with a thought when she died, he hoped she had forgiven him, 'as I now do her; for had I been in her place, I think I might and should, too probably, have acted the same as she did.'

For the remaining three years of her life she lived sometimes in London, sometimes at Teddington, where for ten or twelve years previously she had had a country villa, with lawn sloping to the river. Her mother still lived, and

was adequately provided for. John O'Keeffe says in his *Recollections* :—

‘I remember . . . seeing her mother, whom she comfortably supported ; a respectable-looking old lady, in her short black velvet cloak, with deep rich fringe, a diamond ring, and a small agate snuff-box. She had nothing to mind but going the rounds of the Catholic Chapels, and chatting with her neighbours.’

Her sister Mary was also adequately provided for. Lee Lewes says that notwithstanding her own irregularities, she was ever anxious for her sister's honour. Mary, who was considered by some even more beautiful than Margaret, was educated, at the latter's expense, at a continental convent. In 1745 she attempted the stage, but was as conspicuous a failure as her sister had been a success. Then she had the good fortune to marry Captain the Hon. George Cholmondeley, son of the Earl of Cholmondeley, and nephew of Horace Walpole. In December 1746, Walpole, writing to Mann, laments this misfortune which has happened in his family. And the story goes that the young man's father hurried up to London to see whether the marriage could not be annulled. But, after an interview with Peg Woffington, he declared that her beauty and charm had quite reconciled him to the marriage of his son with her sister, which at first had given him such offence. ‘My Lord,’ she is said to have replied, ‘I have much more reason to be offended at it than your lordship, for whereas I had but one beggar to support, I now have two.’ She is reported to have taken a house for them in Westminster, furnished it handsomely, and in addition provided them with money to live on. But perhaps the foregoing speech, together with his lordship's complacency, may have relieved her of the responsibility. Captain Cholmondeley afterwards quitted the army, and was provided for by his influential friends in the Church. Like her sister,

Mary seems to have been a woman of wit and culture as well as beauty; and it is certainly a most extraordinary circumstance that two such women should have been the children of an Irish bricklayer and a washerwoman. Boswell relates that Mrs. Cholmondeley and some other ladies were dining with Sir Joshua Reynolds one day in 1778, when Mary, in a high flow of spirits, exhibited some lively sallies of hyperbolical compliment to Johnson, 'with whom she had been long acquainted, and was very easy.' He answered her, somewhat in the style of a hero of romance, 'Madam, you crown me with unfading laurels.' On another occasion, reported by Murphy, Johnson, sitting at table with her, took hold of her hand in the middle of dinner, and held it close to his eye, wondering at its delicacy and whiteness, till with a smile she asked, 'Will he give it to me again when he has done with it?' Johnson told Fanny Burney that Mrs. Cholmondeley was the first person who publicly praised and recommended *Evelina* among the wits; and Fanny's father told her that she could not have had a greater compliment than making two such friends as Mrs. Thrale and Mrs. Cholmondeley, for they were 'severe and knowing, and afraid of praising *à tort et à travers*, as their opinions were liable to be quoted.'

Six months after Peg Woffington had left the stage in consequence of the sudden disablement already described, we find Walpole writing to Sir Horace Mann:—

'I shall wind up this letter with an admirable *bon mot*. Somebody asked me at the play the other night what had become of Mrs. Woffington; I replied she is taken off by Colonel Cæsar. Lord Tyrawley said, I suppose she was reduced to *aut Cæsar aut Nullus*.'

Peg Woffington's apologists are ready enough to denounce the writer of the *Memoirs* of 1760 as a malicious and lying pamphleteer, whenever he says anything to their heroine's

discredit ; but they are also equally ready to take from him any story to her credit, even when it is without the slightest foundation, and directly contradicted by other unimpeachable testimony. This writer, who was not always accurately informed, alleges that, in consequence of accidentally hearing a sermon by a clergyman who afterwards became Archbishop of Canterbury, she resolved to become a new creature, discarded her lovers, left the stage, raised her mother's allowance from twenty to thirty pounds a year, constantly attended divine service, and associated with none but persons of exemplary virtue. On the sole authority of this (otherwise by them discredited) writer, Charles Reade, in his novel, makes her abandon the stage in the zenith of her charms and fame, and become 'a humble, pious, long-repentant Christian.' Galt, in his *Lives of the Players*, tells a similar story. Dr. Doran, in his *Annals of the Stage*, calls her a penitent Magdalen. And Augustin Daly, while changing the preacher from the Archbishop of Canterbury to John Wesley, accepts the sermon ; though he also propounds the curious hypothesis that as Captain Cholmondeley left the army and became a parson, it is probable that his wife converted him, and if so, that she converted Margaret also ! The truth is, there is no evidence whatever of any such conversion ; and all that we know of her later days is altogether inconsistent with any such edifying conclusion to her story. She did not voluntarily abandon the stage, but was prevented from acting by a disabling illness. And after her involuntary and, as she evidently hoped, only temporary retirement, she did not associate with none but persons of exemplary virtue, but lived with Colonel Cæsar as his mistress to the end of her days. When, in October 1758, Tate Wilkinson was advertised to appear at Drury Lane in Foote's *Diversions of the Morning*, wherein he gave his imitations of the more pro-

minent of the players, Mrs. Woffington was greatly alarmed lest he should injure her reputation and prospects; and she exhibited something very different from a humble, devout, and charitable spirit in her observations and action on the occasion. Tate Wilkinson assures us that she still 'lived and existed on the flattering hopes of once more captivating the public by her remaining rags of beauty'; and that she expressed her astonishment to hear that he had survived his presumption in 'taking her off' in Ireland. She 'declared by the living God! she was amazed the fellow was not stoned to death in Dublin'; and deputed Colonel Cæsar of the Guards to wait on Garrick in order to put a stop to the performance at his theatre. Colonel Cæsar accordingly informed Garrick that Mrs. Woffington was now 'under his protection,' and that if the performance were permitted he should call him out. Garrick appears to have thought the matter not worth a duel, and gave Colonel Cæsar his word of honour that Wilkinson should not imitate Mrs. Woffington in his performance at Drury Lane. Although it was rumoured at the time that Colonel Cæsar and Mrs. Woffington were secretly married, it afterwards became quite certain that they were not. Mr. Daly wriggles round this in an astonishing manner. In relating the foregoing incident he unwarrantably states that when Colonel Cæsar called on Garrick 'he affirmed that as Mrs. Woffington *was soon to be his wife*, any affront shown to her would be resented by him.' And we are even invited, on the strength of some 'Mackliniana' in an old magazine, to revise the inscription which Mrs. Cholmondeley had engraved on her sister's tombstone; for Mr. Daly observes: 'It has been said that Peg Woffington died a spinster. The memorial tablet in the little church at Teddington perpetuates this supposition in cold marble.' 'This supposition' is as cool as the marble! According to Tate Wilkinson, who is confirmed by Macklin, there was an

agreement between Colonel Cæsar and Peg Woffington that whichever were the survivor should inherit all that the other possessed; and they were each said to have made a will to this effect. But when she died, in March 1760, it was found that, with the exception of an annuity to her mother, she had left everything she possessed to her sister, Mrs. Cholmondeley; thus disappointing Colonel Cæsar (to quote Macklin's cynical remark), as he perhaps might have disappointed her had it been his turn to go first. Her fortune is said to have been £5000; but according to a banker's statement published by Mr. Daly, it probably amounted to a good deal more. The tradition of the piety of Peg Woffington's later years has probably been supported by another tradition that she founded some almshouses in the neighbourhood of her villa at Teddington. Dr. Doran, the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and Mr. Daly, all say that she built and endowed a number of almshouses at Teddington; and the last named gives a photograph of a row of workmen's cottages, which he leads us to suppose are still inhabited by the recipients of his heroine's bounty. But the plain truth is that these cottages are not, and never have been, almshouses. An octogenarian parish official of Teddington remembers these workmen's cottages being sold two or three times in the course of his lifetime; and asserts that one of the purchasers, having investigated the matter, discovered that Peg Woffington died before the building of them was finished, that they were sold by her executors, and that there is no evidence that they were ever intended for almshouses at all.

GEORGE ANNE BELLAMY

WHEN Miss (or 'Mrs.') George Anne Bellamy sat down at fifty-eight years of age to write what she termed an 'Apology' for her life, she found so much to apologise for that the exculpatory autobiography occupied no less than six printed volumes. Some critics have questioned the authenticity of these Memoirs; alleging that they were entirely composed by one Alexander Bicknell, an industrious eighteenth-century littérateur, who produced a whole shelf-full of other quasi-historical works, now deservedly forgotten. But however much credit (or discredit) may be due to Bicknell for the form and style of the work, it is plain enough that the matter of it must have been communicated by the lady herself; and even as regards the form, although Bicknell may perhaps have supplied some of the sufficiently obvious moralisings, and have given here and there a Johnsonian turn to a period, the greater part of the narrative bears indubitable evidence on the face of it of having been merely taken down from the vivacious actress's own lips. Miss Bellamy's memory was not always as trustworthy as might be desired; and a number of errors of detail concerning the theatrical life both of herself and of her contemporaries, to some of which Tate Wilkinson drew attention (and which she readily admitted), may be set down to the fact of her never having kept a diary, or even made any loose memoranda of events such as would have assisted her recollection. She scarcely ever gives a date; and the reader is sometimes unable to tell whether months or years have elapsed between

some of the adventures which she relates. But there seems no reason to doubt that the chief events of her life are related with substantial accuracy; although considerable allowance must of course be made for a natural inclination to represent her own conduct and character in as favourable a light as could by any possibility be made reconcileable with the admitted 'errors and misfortunes' of her decidedly unconventional career. One of the avowed objects of her 'Apology' was to clear her character from the false accusations which had been made by a hack writer, hired for the purpose, in a 'wretched production' issued some four and twenty years previously. But she also hoped that a candid recapitulation of her various 'imprudences,' and the disastrous results which attended them, might prove a beacon to warn the young and thoughtless of her own sex from 'the Syren shore of vanity, dissipation and illicit pleasures.' Should the relation of her errors and their consequences warn others to shun the paths she had pursued, she felt that she would have, after all, employed her time to some good purpose; and she concluded her piteous story by imploring her readers to have the same indulgence and compassion for her which she claimed to have invariably shown to others. No narrative, certainly, ever carried its own moral more clearly on the face of it; but it is by no means equally clear that she had any adequate justification for invoking Sterne's Recording Angel to drop a tear upon her faults and blot them out for ever.

It has been well said that George Anne Bellamy's adventures began before she was born. Her mother was the only daughter of a prosperous Quaker farmer named Seal, who, in addition to extensive hop grounds in the neighbourhood of Maidstone, possessed a considerable estate, known as Mount Sion, in the neighbourhood of Tunbridge Wells. When farmer Seal died suddenly, without leaving a will, his

young and beautiful widow got rid of the Maidstone property, and removed with her child to Mount Sion. She had several houses there, and these she furnished with much elegance, and let, during the season, to persons of the first distinction who came to drink the waters at Tunbridge Wells. Most of the houses at Mount Sion, it may be remarked in passing, are devoted to a similar purpose at the present day. Her beauty and fortune attracted many suitors; and, after a decorous interval, she accepted a neighbouring builder named Busby. Unfortunately she married him without having any proper marriage settlement; and no very long time after, the whole of her property was seized to pay his debts. Amongst the distinguished visitors who occasionally occupied one of Mrs. Busby's houses was the Hon. Mrs. Godfrey, sister to the great Duke of Marlborough. Mrs. Godfrey had taken a fancy to Mrs. Busby's child, and when she heard of the disastrous result of the mother's marriage, she offered to take the girl and place her in a boarding-school in Queen's Square with her own daughter, an offer which of course Mrs. Busby was very thankful to accept. Miss Seal, however, proved to be a very precocious young lady; and at the age of fourteen she eloped from school with Lord Tyrawley; who established her in his apartments in Somerset House, promised to marry her as soon as he had an opportunity, and in the meantime allowed her the use of his noble name. A visit to his estates in Ireland a few months afterwards, however, convinced his lordship that his neglect and his steward's mismanagement had involved him in such hopeless debt that the only way out of his difficulties would be to marry a wealthy heiress. After looking around, he fixed upon Lady Mary Stewart, daughter of the Earl of Blessington, as an eminently suitable person, seeing that her father proposed to endow her with £30,000. But Lord Blessington, having heard rumours of the elope-

ment with Miss Seal, wrote to that young lady asking to know the precise nature of her connection with his future son-in-law. Miss Seal, in a rage, replied by at once sending off to him every letter her faithless lover had ever written to her, including an unopened one which she had that instant received. In this last-named letter Lord Tyrawley informed his innamorata of the distressful condition of his affairs, and of the sad necessity there was for him to marry at once some lady of fortune. He added that he should stay no longer with his intended wife than was necessary to obtain her money, when he would immediately fly on the wings of love to share it with her; that, though another had his hand, she alone possessed his heart, and was his real wife in the sight of Heaven; and that, in order to testify to the truth of this, he had made choice of Lady Mary Stewart, who was both ugly and foolish, in preference to one with an equal fortune who was both beautiful and sensible, lest an union with a more agreeable person might be the means of decreasing his affection for her. Lord Blessington's feelings when he read this precious epistle may be readily imagined. He at once forbade his daughter ever to see or hold any communication with Lord Tyrawley again. But in this he was too late; for Tyrawley, in his hurry to have the fingering of that £30,000, had already persuaded the young lady into a secret marriage. It was not too late, however, for Lord Blessington to refuse a settlement; and as soon as Tyrawley found there was no money forthcoming, he at once determined to have no more to do with his plain-looking lady. He settled £800 a year on her; established her in the rooms in Somerset House from which Miss Seal, in her distraction, had instantly fled; and immediately applied for, and promptly obtained, the post of Ambassador to the Court of Lisbon. Meanwhile, Miss Seal had gone to live with her mother in Lincoln's Inn Fields, where a son was

born, who received his father's family name of O'Hara. Mrs. Butler, one of the principal actresses at Drury Lane, who was a friend of the mother's, advised Miss Seal to try her fortune on the stage, for, although she exhibited no great capacity for acting, her tall, striking figure and beautiful face would probably prove a sufficient attraction. She managed to secure an engagement at the Dublin theatre, and, leaving her baby boy with her mother in London, set out for Ireland. She appears to have met with considerable success, and performed in Dublin for several years, until, having had a quarrel with the proprietors of the theatre, she suddenly determined to pack up her small wardrobe and follow Lord Tyrawley to Portugal. She was received, it appears, with 'the warmest transports'; but the wily diplomatist, having had some experience of the violence of her temper, judiciously said nothing about a connection he had formed in Lisbon with a certain Donna Anna, and carried Miss Seal off to the house of an English merchant at which he was a frequent visitor. While thus situated, she attracted the attention of an English officer, Captain Bellamy, who proposed marriage, and was unhesitatingly refused. Captain Bellamy knew nothing of her antecedents, but he suspected that Lord Tyrawley somehow stood in his way, so, by way of clearing the ground for himself, he took an early opportunity of informing his inamorata about Donna Anna, who had recently presented his lordship with a second pledge of his affection. Miss Seal's anger at this intelligence immediately induced her to agree to marry the Captain; who hurried matters with such precipitancy that the nuptial knot was tied, and they had set off in a ship for Ireland, before Tyrawley heard a word of the matter. 'In a few months after the arrival of Captain Bellamy and his new-married lady at the place of their destination,' writes George Anne, 'to the inexpressible astonishment and

dissatisfaction of the former, I made my appearance on this habitable globe.' Her mother, she says, had been so clever, that the Captain had never entertained the slightest suspicion of the real nature of her relations with Lord Tyrawley ; and he was so confounded by the sudden appearance of an unexpected child, that he immediately left the kingdom, and never either saw or corresponded with his wife again. Lord Tyrawley had had enough of the mother ; but he appears to have been pleased enough to own the paternity of the child, and sent instructions to his adjutant, Captain Pye, to take the infant and bring it up with his own children. Young George Anne (she was called Georgiana, but had been by mistake registered with one masculine and one feminine name) accordingly remained in the care of Mrs. Pye for several years. Mrs. Bellamy seems to have parted with her without regret ; and the account of George Anne's first interview with her mother some years afterwards presents that parent in no very amiable light. While the child was in London, on her way to be placed in a convent school in France, the maid-servant who had the charge of her, seeing the mother's name in the play-bills of Covent Garden Theatre, imagined they would be no unacceptable visitors.

'She accordingly inquired where my mother lodged, and without asking her mistress's consent, led me to her. We were instantly ushered upstairs, where we found my mother in a genteel undress. Though I was too young to experience any attraction from her beauty, yet her fine clothes pleased me much, and I ran towards her with great freedom. But what concern did my little heart feel when she rudely pushed me from her, and I heard her exclaim, after viewing me with attention for some moments,—“My God ! What have you brought me here ? This goggle-eyed, splatter-faced, gabbart-mouthed wretch is not my child ! Take her away !” I had been so accustomed to endearments that I was the more sensibly affected at this unexpected salutation, and I went away as much disgusted with my mother as she could be with me.'

George Anne, and her friend Miss Frazer, remained in the convent school of the Ursulines at Boulogne until the former had attained her eleventh year. What sort of an education they received we are not told; but they appear to have been very comfortable there; and when writing her memoirs more than half a century afterwards she could not help exclaiming 'Dear, happy, much-regretted mansion! How supremely blessed should I have been had I remained till this hour within thy sacred walls!' But we may take it for granted that the young girl was pleased enough to get away when, in 1742, she and her friend Miss Frazer were brought to London and placed in charge of a person named Duval, formerly a domestic of Lord Tyrawley's and now a peruke-maker in St. James's Street, to await her father's return from Portugal. In November 1742, Horace Walpole reported to Sir Horace Mann that 'Lord Tyrawley is come from Portugal, and has brought three wives and fourteen children; one of the former is a Portuguese, with long hair plaited down to the bottom of her back.' George Anne describes his house in Stratton Street as having more the appearance of a Turkish seraglio than the mansion of an English nobleman; and says that although he was very pleased with her, Donna Anna, who was jealous for several children of her own, was not so pleased; and neither Miss Frazer nor George Anne was particularly pleased with Donna Anna. To avoid quarrelling, therefore, these two girls were boarded with a Mrs. Jones, who kept a shop much frequented by ladies of quality in St. James's Street, until Miss Frazer took the measles and died, when George Anne fretted so much that Lord Tyrawley took a house at Bushy and removed there with his miscellaneous family, including, as George Anne reports, 'Donna Anna, three girls all by different mothers, and myself.' The younger boys had been sent to school at Marylebone; and the eldest,

George Anne's brother, was at sea. Not long after their removal to Bushy, Donna Anna had the impudence to assume the title of Lady Tyrawley at a pleasure party, whereupon his lordship promptly packed her and the other girls back to London, keeping George Anne with him alone. She appears to have been his favourite; partly because she resembled him in features, partly because he thought she had inherited some of his wit. His company soon perceived that the best way to pay court to him was by being lavish in their praise of her; whereby she came in for a good deal more professed admiration and flattery than was at all good for her. Even the superfine Lord Chesterfield condescended to bestow upon her his 'elegant praises'; and it appears to have been only a certain crooked little great man at Twickenham who had the courage to place her on her proper level. She could repeat the first three books of Pope's *Homer* by rote; and having one day persuaded her father to let her accompany him on a visit to the poet, she looked forward to creating a great impression by her literary acquirements and wit. But as soon as they were shown in, Mr. Pope rang for his housekeeper and desired her to take little 'Miss' into the gardens and give her as much fruit as she chose to eat; whereat 'Miss' felt herself to have been more humiliated than ever before in her short life. But this brief period of splendour as the acknowledged and favourite daughter of a lord was as brief as it was bright. Within a year Lord Tyrawley left London for Russia, to which country he had been appointed Ambassador; leaving George Anne in charge of a lady of quality in London, with an allowance of £100 a year for her personal expenses. Then her troubles began. Her mother had meanwhile been married to and deserted by a scape-grace officer, son of Sir George Walter, young enough to have been her own child. Young Walter, when ordered to

join his regiment at Gibraltar, had not only taken a younger woman abroad with him, but had stripped his wife of every valuable she possessed. In her distress Mrs. Walter implored George Anne to live with her in order that she might share in the annuity of £100, and naturally enough the young girl at once responded to her mother's appeal. But when her next quarter's allowance became due, the two wretched women found to their dismay that payment had been stopped, and that Duval had received a letter from Lord Tyrawley in which he said that, as George Anne had returned to her mother, not only would he make her no further allowance, but he renounced her for ever.

Her associates were now exclusively her mother's friends in the theatrical profession. One day as she and the daughters of Rich, the proprietor of Covent Garden Theatre, were acting *Othello* for their own amusement, Rich himself happened to overhear them; and he was so charmed with the tones of her voice that he there and then offered her an engagement in his theatre if she would consent to undergo the necessary study. At this time, according to her own story, she was only fourteen years of age; but there is no doubt that she never knew for certain in what year she was born, and if we take the date 1727 (which is given by Chetwood) as the year of her birth, she would be seventeen. Her figure, she says, was not inelegant, she had a powerful voice, was as light as a gossamer, possessed of inexhaustible spirits, and of some humour. But when Rich proposed to bring her out in the part of Monimia in *The Orphan*, Quin, who was at that time the autocrat of the theatre, was flatly against the experiment. Rich, who usually deferred to Quin in everything, on this occasion showed unwonted determination, and said he would be master in his own house. But the offended Quin refused to attend the rehearsals, and two other actors, who were

to play the parts of Monimia's lovers, likewise refused to put in an appearance. When she made her *début*, on 22nd November 1744, it seemed at first as though Quin's prognostications were to be justified. Throughout the first, second, and third acts she appeared to be dazed, both memory and voice completely failing her; but the audience was fortunately kind and encouraging, and to the exultation of the manager, and the astonishment of everybody else, in the fourth act she seemed to be suddenly inspired, 'blazed out with meridian splendour,' and scored a triumphant success. Quin, who was as fascinated as he was surprised, lifted her up in a transport of enthusiasm, exclaiming 'Thou art a divine creature, and the true spirit is in thee!' From that moment the old actor became one of her firmest friends. He at once inquired into her circumstances, and finding her to be a daughter of his old acquaintance Lord Tyrawley, he sent her mother a bank note in a blank cover by the penny post, and gave George Anne a general invitation to his famous supper parties; at the same time humorously enjoining her never to come alone, as he was not yet too old to be beyond censure. All the literati of the time frequented these parties; and she declares that her judgment was more enlightened by the conversation she heard at Quin's table than it would have been if she had read every book that came out during her whole lifetime.

The beautiful young actress now became one of the principal attractions of Covent Garden; and as Rich professed himself unable to pay her a salary proportionate to her astonishing success, it was agreed that she should have one of his nights for a free benefit. Having few friends, she did not anticipate that this would prove a particularly lucrative arrangement; but she was most agreeably disappointed. Some days before the date which had been

fixed upon, she received a message from the eccentric Duchess of Queensberry asking her to call at Queensberry House the next day by twelve o'clock. She accordingly dressed herself as finely as possible, took a chair, sent in her name, and was dumfounded when the servant returned with a message to the effect that her Grace knew no such person. The mystery of this peculiar treatment was not lessened when in the theatre that evening, on Prince Lobkowitz wanting to engage a box for the *Corps Diplomatique* on the occasion of her benefit, she found that she had not a single box to dispose of, and was informed that the Duchess of Queensberry had engaged every one that was to be had, besides sending for two hundred and fifty tickets. Another note from the Duchess making a second appointment for the following morning, which she found awaiting her at home, was a further surprise. Fearful of a second mortification, and determining that at any rate nobody but herself should know anything about it, she dressed herself as quietly as possible next morning, and set out on foot for Queensberry House. This time she was immediately admitted, and on being shown up to the Duchess's apartment was addressed as follows:—

“Well, young woman! What business had you in a chair yesterday? It was a fine morning, and you might have walked. You look as you ought to do now” (observing my gown). “Nothing is so vulgar as wearing silk in a morning. Simplicity best becomes youth. And you do not stand in need of ornaments. Therefore dress always plain, except when you are upon the stage.” Whilst her Grace was talking in this manner to me, she was cleaning a picture; which I officiously requesting her permission to do, she hastily replied—“Don’t you think I have domestics enough if I did not choose to do it myself?” I apologised for my presumption, by informing her Grace that I had been for some time at Jones’s, where I had been flattered that I had acquired a tolerable proficiency in that art. The Duchess upon this exclaimed—“Are you the girl I have heard Chesterfield

speak of?" Upon my answering that I had the honour of being known to his lordship, she ordered a canvas bag to be taken out of her cabinet, saying, "To no person can Queensberry give less than gold. There are two hundred and fifty guineas, and twenty for the Duke's ticket and mine; but I must give you something for Tyrawley's sake."—She then took a bill from her pocket-book, which having put into my hands, she told me her coach was ordered to carry me home, lest any accident should happen now I had such a charge about me.'

That she had numerous admirers among the fine gentlemen about town is not to be wondered at; and on this subject her good friend Quin gave her a word of warning. Calling her one day to his dressing-room he said, 'My dear girl, you are vastly followed, I hear. Do not let the love of finery, or any other inducement, prevail upon you to commit an indiscretion. Men in general are rascals. You are young and engaging, and therefore ought to be doubly cautious. If you want anything in my power, which money can purchase, come to me and say—"James Quin, give me such a thing," and my purse shall be always at your service.' She was affected to tears, she says, by the kindness and generosity of the man whom she had already come to love as a father; and perhaps she gave some heed to his good advice—for a time. At any rate, when Mr. Montgomery (afterwards Sir George Metham) became very pressing in his attentions, she gave him to understand that she would not listen to any proposals but marriage and a coach. He told her bluntly, but honestly, that his dependence on his father, whose consent he could not hope to procure, would prevent his complying with the first of her conditions; and, as for the second, he could not afford that in any case. He was deeply smitten, and retired to his father's place in Yorkshire to get over his disappointment; but his candour had made a very favourable impression on the mind of the young damsel of seventeen; so, at least, she says; but

we may shrewdly suspect that his good looks and elegant manner were at least equally potent. A less scrupulous admirer was Lord Byron, a nobleman who, unlike his illustrious descendant the poet, had nothing but his title and an agreeable-looking face to boast about. Byron's vanity was hurt by her decisive rejection of his proposals; and he formed a plot to kidnap her. One of his friends, a noble earl whose name is not given, who was engaged in a similar pursuit of one of her theatrical friends, called at her house in Southampton Street one day to inform her that this friend of hers was in a coach at the end of the street and wished to speak with her for a moment. When George Anne at once unsuspectingly ran out, without waiting even to put on a hat, Byron's noble friend suddenly hoisted her into the coach and drove off as fast as the horses could gallop. During the drive his lordship cynically told her that she would do well to consent to make his friend happy, for Byron was shortly to be married to Miss Shaw, whose large fortune would enable him to provide handsomely for any one whom he took under his protection. At length the coach stopped in what was then a lonely place, fronting the fields, at the top of North Audley Street, she was carried into her abductor's house, and the nobleman left her there, saying he was going to prepare a lodging for her at a mantua-maker's in Broad Street, Carnaby Market. By one of those extraordinary freaks of fortune which are supposed to happen only in novels, George Anne's brother, just returned home from sea, arrived at the top of Southampton Street just as the coach was driving away with his sister. On being informed of what had happened, he immediately went on to the earl's house, and finding that his lordship had gone out for a short time, walked about within sight of the door to await his return. The earl seems to have been ready enough with a plausible story, and convinced O'Hara that George

Anne had been a consenting party to Byron's proposals; so that when they walked into the room together, and she flew into the arms of her brother, the young sailor shook her off so roughly that she fell insensible to the ground. However, before he left the house he gave the earl so sound a thrashing, and so effectually frightened him with the threat of a prosecution, that his lordship promptly took himself out of the way, after leaving instructions with his housekeeper to pack the young woman off to the mantua-maker's in Broad Street as speedily as possible. Meanwhile, O'Hara called on Lord Byron, but, crediting his lordship's assurances that he knew nothing whatever of the affair, the impulsive sailor, satisfied with the drubbing he had administered to the other peer, made no further inquiries, returned to his ship at Portsmouth, and left his abandoned sister to her fate. It must be remembered that we have only George Anne's own uncorroborated account of this affair. Her 'elopement,' she tells us, was grossly misrepresented in the newspapers, which of course is likely enough. At the same time it is not easy to reconcile her own account of the matter with such complete innocence on her part as she would have us believe in. Seeing that, according to her own story, she had thus been dramatically rescued from her captor within a few hours, and before any further harm could befall her, and that the mantua-maker to whose house she was removed turned out to be her own dressmaker, it does not seem very clear why she should not have at once returned home. We are asked to believe that, instead of following this natural course, she wrote to her mother to assure that experienced lady of her innocence, and that the wily deceiver of Captain Bellamy had now become so abnormally pious, and was so disgusted at having a daughter who was in any way concerned in an elopement with a peer, that the letters were returned unopened. This harsh treatment brought on a fever; after

which it was necessary for the young lady to go into the country to recuperate; so she bethought herself of some Quaker relations at Braintree in Essex, a visit to whom would not only be beneficial to her health but to her pocket also, for an aunt in that family had recently died and left her a legacy of £300, which in her present circumstances it would be extremely convenient for her to receive. She went down to Braintree so plainly dressed (from necessity rather than design, we are assured) that her Quaker relatives welcomed her as a member of the sect. And although her aunt's legacy had been left her on condition that she did not follow her mother's example of going on the stage, George Anne did not think it necessary to inform her country cousins that she had already made her appearance on the boards, but quietly pocketed the money. When, a few weeks later, a chance visitor from London let the cat out of the bag, her visit came to an abrupt end; and, not wishing to return to town so soon, she took lodgings in a farmhouse at Ingatestone. While there, she was surprised by a visit from her mother, who (partly convinced, perhaps, by the £300 legacy) had suddenly become assured of her daughter's innocence, and was anxious for a reconciliation. They returned to London together; and shortly afterwards she accepted an engagement from Sheridan to play at his Dublin theatre.

Immediately on her arrival in Dublin she called on Lord Tyrawley's sister, Miss O'Hara, and so favourably impressed that lady, that she was introduced as Miss O'Hara's niece into the most fashionable society. She gave her aunt, she says, a full and frank account of her affairs, without making the slightest reservations, for—

‘It is an established maxim with me never to rest satisfied with gaining the good opinion of any person by halves. In endeavouring to acquire a friend it is necessary to let them into the whole of

your situation, otherwise you conduct yourself with the same absurdity as if while you consulted a physician you concealed the symptoms or nature of your disorder from him. Where a disclosure of secrets becomes needful, an open implicit confidence is required, otherwise the chance of success is greatly against you.'

Certain philosophical remarks of this character, which are to be found here and there throughout Miss Bellamy's *Apology*, have usually been credited to the literary gentleman who assisted her in the composition of the book; but he was certainly not at hand forty years previously when she so sensibly acted on the principle here laid down. Miss O'Hara's protection, and the friendships she in consequence formed with Mrs. Butler, Miss St. Leger, and other leaders of fashion in Dublin, were not only privately a great gratification, but were also of much service to her in her profession, making the whole of the Irish aristocracy her enthusiastic patrons in the theatre. It gave her, in fact, so assured a position that even the great Garrick found he could not venture to offend her with impunity. In her agreement with Sheridan she appears to have stipulated for the choice of certain parts; but when *King John* was played during the time when Garrick was temporarily of the company, he objected to her playing the part of Constance, on account of her youth, and Mrs. Furnival was substituted. George Anne had a milder temper than her mother; but she did not intend to be shelved in this manner without a protest. She flew to Mrs. Butler and other of her fashionable friends, who espoused her quarrel with such effect that on the night *King John* was played with Mrs. Furnival as Constance the theatre scarcely contained £40; but as soon as the play was again produced with Miss Bellamy restored to her part, the house was crowded, and enough people were turned away from the doors to have filled it over again. This, she says, was the first theatrical

humiliation which 'the immortal Roscius' ever met with. But she takes care to let us know it was not the last he received, even at her hands; for when he fixed upon *Jane Shore* for the first of his two benefits, and asked her to perform that character for him, she declined, alleging the same objection he had made to her playing *Constance*, namely her youth. But Garrick was now thoroughly alive to her value as a 'draw' in Dublin, and he not only went about imploring Mrs. Butler and other friends to persuade Miss Bellamy to play this part, but also wrote a letter to herself in which he said that if she would so oblige him, he would write her 'a goody-goody epilogue,' which, with the help of her eyes, would do more mischief than ever the flesh or the devil had done since the world began.

'This ridiculous epistle he directed "To My Soul's Idol, the Beautified Ophelia"; and delivered to his servant with orders to bring it to me. But the fellow, having some more agreeable amusement to pursue than going on his master's errands, gave it to a porter in the street, without having attended to the curious direction that was on it. The porter, upon reading the subscription, and not knowing throughout the whole city of Dublin any lady of quality who bore the title either of "My Soul's Idol" or "The Beautified Ophelia," naturally concluded that it was to answer some jocular purpose. He accordingly carried it to his master, who happened to be a newsman; and by this means it got the next day into the public prints.'

Garrick's mortification may be easily imagined; but after this, he and Miss Bellamy were reconciled; and he became a frequent visitor at the houses of Colonel Butler and other of her aristocratic friends. But there was subsequent trouble with another person concerned. Mrs. Furnival was deeply aggrieved at having been ousted from the part of *Constance*; and before long found what she thought an excellent opportunity for paying off the score. She was cast for the part of *Octavia* in *All for Love*, Miss Bellamy being the *Cleopatra*.

Tragedy queens were rather queerly clothed in those days; and for Cleopatra the manager had bought in London a superb dress which had belonged to the Princess of Wales, and had been worn only once on the King's birthday. This dress had been taken in so as to fit George Anne's small waist; and a number of diamonds, kindly lent for the occasion by her friend Mrs. Butler, had been sown on to make it additionally splendid. As ill luck would have it, just as George Anne's dresser and mantua-maker had finished this piece of work they were called out of the room, and Mrs. Furnival, happening to pass by on her way to her own dressing-room, was consumed with envy to think that her hated rival was to appear that night in such a splendid new costume. With the idea, presumably, that fine feathers make fine birds, and not considering how inappropriate it would be for the character she was about to play, Mrs. Furnival pounced upon the robe, carried it off to her own room, and immediately set to work to let it out again to fit her ampler proportions. When Miss Bellamy's dresser returned and discovered what had happened, she was almost frantic; and as Mrs. Furnival refused to return the dress when requested in a civil manner, the hot-tempered Irish girl attacked her mistress's rival literally tooth and nail. But it was all to no purpose: Mrs. Furnival remained the victor, and merely condescended to promise that the jewels should be carefully returned after the performance was over. Nobody else seems to have known what had been going on in the rival dressing-rooms; and some surprise was expressed when Cleopatra appeared dressed with all the simplicity of a Roman matron; but when Octavia subsequently came on attired in the silver tissue and jewels of the Egyptian queen, players and public alike were struck dumb with astonishment. When Sheridan, who had to introduce Octavia to the Emperor, saw the jay

coming on, in all her incongruous borrowed plumes, he was so confounded that it was some minutes before he could go on with his part. And just at this moment of silent astonishment the whole house heard Mrs. Butler exclaim from her box—‘Good Heavens, the woman has got on my diamonds!’ It was a case of the biter bit; for at the end of the act the audience, though knowing nothing of what had happened behind the scenes, shouted out ‘No more Furnival! No more Furnival!’ and that disappointed lady had a succession of fits, while another actress dressed to continue the part for the rest of the play.

While in Dublin, Miss Bellamy seems to have appeared almost every evening throughout the season, sometimes in characters very unfit for her; but, always devoting much application and study to her parts, she became equally successful in low and high comedy and in tragedy. Her aristocratic connections, no doubt, made her position somewhat less intolerable than that of other actresses in an Irish theatre; and the following instance of rudeness which she records, though characteristic enough of the theatrical manners of the day, was probably unique in her own experience—

‘A gentleman who stood near the stage door took a very unallowable method of showing his approbation. Being a little flushed with liquor—or otherwise I am persuaded he could not have been capable of the rudeness—he put his lips to the back of my neck as I passed him. Justly enraged at so great an insult, and not considering that the Lord-Lieutenant was present, or that it was committed before such a number of spectators, I instantly turned about and gave the gentleman a slap in the face. Violent and unbecoming as this sudden token of resentment appeared, it received the approbation of Lord Chesterfield, who rose from his seat and applauded me for some time with his hands; the whole audience, as you may suppose, following his example. At the conclusion of the act, Major Macartney came, by order of his Excellency, to Mr. St. Leger (that was the gentleman’s name) requesting that he would make a public apology for this forgetful-

ness of decorum ; which he accordingly did. I have reason to believe that this incident contributed to a reform which Mr. Sheridan with great propriety soon after made. Agreeable to this regulation, no gentlemen in future were to be admitted behind the scenes.'

Amongst the acquaintances which Miss Bellamy made at this time in Dublin, mention must be made of the Gunnings, afterwards so celebrated for their beauty. She relates that as she was one day returning from rehearsal, she heard a sound of lamentation proceeding from a house at the bottom of Britain Street, and with characteristic impulsiveness, pushed past some evil-looking men who were guarding the door, to inquire if she could be of any assistance. Inside she found a woman of a most elegant figure, surrounded by four beautiful girls and a young boy, all evidently in a state of the utmost distress. The lady, who was Mrs. Gunning, informed her that, in consequence of living beyond his income, her husband had been obliged to retire into the country to avoid arrest. Her brother, Lord Mayo, would not listen to her solicitations for help ; and the men at the door were bailiffs, who would shortly turn her and her children into the street. George Anne's sympathies were aroused ; and after a short consultation it was arranged that her man-servant should come after nightfall and take away everything that could be thrown out to him from the drawing-room window ; that the two eldest girls (who afterwards became Countess of Coventry and Duchess of Argyll respectively) should stay with her as long as necessary. The other children were to be placed with an aunt, and Mrs. Gunning was to join her husband and assist him in the settlement of his affairs. The two girls were most grateful for the asylum thus afforded them, and professed great affection for their youthful protector—for it must be remembered that George Anne was herself at this time only

a girl of eighteen. She tells a curious story of a visit they all paid one day to a reputed witch in Dublin; a story that, if not afterwards somewhat altered to fit the facts, is surely one of the most striking cases of fortune-telling on record. This old hag had acquired such fame for her prognostications that she was popularly known as 'Madame Fortune.' In order to give her no clue to their identity, the three girls dressed themselves as meanly as possible; walked instead of driving to her dwelling; and, by way of further deception, George Anne wore a wedding ring which she had borrowed for the occasion. What happened was thus described by Miss Bellamy forty years afterwards:—

'Upon Miss Molly being ushered into her presence, she without any hesitation told her that she would be *titled* (so she expressed herself) *but far from happy*. When Miss Betsy appeared, she declared that she would be *great to a degree*, and that she would be happy in the connections which conduced to that greatness; but from a want of health (which alone can give value to either riches or to grandeur) she would find considerable abatement to that happiness.—When your humble servant presented herself she said I might take off the ring I wore, as I never was, nor ever should be *married*, unless I played the fool in my old age. To this she added that opulence would court me, and flattery follow me, notwithstanding which, through my own folly, I should be brought to disgrace.'

George Anne maintained an affectionate correspondence with these girls for some time after she had left Dublin and returned to Covent Garden; but some years later, one of them, then Countess of Coventry, publicly insulted her in the theatre by laughing aloud just at the most tragic part of her performance of Juliet. The London audience then did what Tate Wilkinson says no provincial audience in those days would have dared to do, viz.: so angrily resented the affront to one of their popular favourites that the lady of quality found it expedient to retire from the theatre.

Next morning, the indignant actress, who had at one time lent Maria Gunning some money, for which she possessed a promissory note, sent a man to Lord Coventry's to demand payment. The money was promised, but it was never paid; and when George Anne came to write her *Apology*, she not only told the whole story, but also printed a friendly letter to herself from Maria Gunning, which, though not directly bearing in any way upon our present history, may be here given *in extenso* as an interesting specimen of the composition and spelling of an eighteenth-century young lady of quality. The occasional gaps, it should be explained, are not due to a desire to suppress anything, but merely to the fact that, after forty years of not very careful preservation, some of the writing had become illegible—

'I Rec^d my Dearest Miss Bellamy Letter at Last: after her long silence, indeed I was very Jealous with you, but you make me amen's in Letting me hear from you now, it gives me great Joy & all our faimely to hear that y^r D^r mama and you Dearest self are in perfect Health to be sure all y^r Relations where fighting to see which of them shod have you first and Longest with you. I hope you are a most tird of england & that we shall soon have your sweet company in Ireland, where you will be heartily welcome, it gives me vast pleasure to hear you haves Thoughts of coming over my Lady . . . To be sure I dont wonder at it, for you know her heart & soul was rapit up in his, as to hows bing the next heir I believe it will be how my Lord pleases, he is in ye Country & my Lady is with us she cant go to her own house I belive she will go strait to england to Miss Bour, I was very unfortunate to be in the Country when our Vaux Hall was, if I was in Town I shou'd be thear & I belive I should be much more delighted than at a publicker diversion, I am quite alterd since I saw you, there is nothing I love so much as solitude; I dont belive it was Mr. knox you read of at Bath for he is hear and pray write me word when you saw or heard from Mr. Crump . . . is out of Town this tow months past every . . . in the country, Dublin is the stupites place . . . in the world I hope y^e winter will be more . . . tho I see know great Liklihood of it, for I

belive Shredian can get know body to play with him is doing all he can to get frinds for him sef to be sure you have bread he is marrd for sirtain to Miss Chamberlan a sweet pare,

‘Papa & mama & Miss Betty & Miss Kittys sincer love and comp^{ts} to y^u & y^r mama y^r Littel Husband sends you ten Thousand Kisses he whisses he had you hear to give y^m to you he says they wo^d be swe . . . Lipess than on paper without making . . . Comp^{ts} he shakes me so I cant write . . . Miss Bellamy will excuse this . . . I must bid a due & shall

only say I am my Dr your
ever affec^{tat}

M. GUNNING.

DUBLIN *august 31.*

‘Mrs. Juffy begs Leave to give her Comp^{ts} to you & she is rejoyes’d to hear you are well, she is in a very bad state of healht.’

But we have been slightly anticipating matters. Miss Bellamy remained in Dublin about three years: at the end of that time she quarrelled with Sheridan, and, refusing to consider any fresh engagement with him, set out for London, to the great regret both of the theatre-going public and her private friends, who loaded her with presents on her departure.

Some little time previously she had refused an engagement with Garrick, who, immediately after his purchase of a half-share of the patent of Drury Lane Theatre, had offered her £10 a week to join his company. Now, however, Garrick regretted that he could not offer her any engagement, as his present company included Mrs. Clive, Mrs. Cibber, and Mrs. Pritchard, who together engrossed all the principal female parts. She therefore joined Rich’s company at Covent Garden, where Peg Woffington was then the bright particular star, between whom and our heroine there was, from first to last, perpetual war. One evening soon after her reappearance on the London boards, as she was playing *Athenais* in *Theodosius*, Lord Byron

appeared in the stage box, and the sight of him frightened her out of her wits. Presently his lordship swaggered behind the scenes and informed Rich that he had come to take away his Athenais, whereupon the manager courageously ordered him off. The next evening, when Quin happened to be at her house to supper, a letter from Lord Byron was brought in in which his lordship swore that if she did not consent to his proposals he would pursue her till she took shelter in the arms of some other protector. Quin instantly bethought himself of a ruse to get rid of the importunate peer, and calling for pen and ink immediately wrote the following answer, which was handed out to Byron's messenger, who waited at the door:—'Lieutenant O'Hara's compliments to Lord Byron, and if he ever dares to insult his sister again it shall not be either his title or cowardice that shall preserve him from chastisement.' Quin evidently knew his man, for Byron was plainly so terrified at the thought of being confronted by his innamorata's pugilistic sailor brother that he set off for Nottinghamshire the very next morning, and George Anne was never troubled by him again. About this time her aunt, Miss O'Hara, died in Dublin. One evening, not long after, Quin stopped her as she was leaving the stage after the conclusion of her part, and told her she must go into the scene-room and kneel to a person whom she would find there. That person proved to be none other than her father, Lord Tyrawley, who embraced her affectionately, said that what he had heard of her both from her aunt and from Quin had given him the greatest satisfaction, and that he proposed to have supper in her apartments, if she could arrange to keep the other females of her household out of the way. He then gave her two rings, one of them having in it a large pink diamond of great value, which he said had been

left her by Miss O'Hara. 'I apprehended,' adds George Anne significantly, 'that this was not the whole of my legacy; but as his lordship took no notice of anything else, I could not with propriety ask him.' Lord Tyrawley now became a frequent visitor at her apartments; but although he generally divided the contents of his purse with her to pay for his entertainment whenever he came, nothing was ever said about any further legacy. For some time past a worthy and well-to-do Dublin merchant named Crump had been paying his addresses to her; but although her mother seconded his suit with all the arguments at her command, George Anne could not be brought to give the poor man any encouragement. Far otherwise was the case when her old admirer Mr. Montgomery reappeared on the scene, having by the death of his mother become possessed of a good estate and changed his name to Metham. He resumed his attentions to her; and she appears to have assumed that after their previous understanding on the matter, such attentions could only mean that he intended an honourable marriage. They were both of a highly romantic mood, she says, and their correspondence 'partook more of the sentiments of Cassandra and Oroondates than of persons on the level with the rest of mankind.' And she went even somewhat further, for, looking upon Metham as her future husband, she made no scruple about accepting the presents (including money) which he was continually pressing upon her. While matters were in this condition, Lord Tyrawley, to her astonishment, insisted that she should marry the objectionable Crump, who was on the point of coming to London for the purpose. Whether what followed was a preconcerted manœuvre on the part of the romantic lovers, or whether Metham took her by surprise, as she seems to imply, is a doubtful point. But, on the very day of Crump's arrival, just at the beginning of the fifth act

of the play in which she took a principal part, Metham carried her off in a coach to his house in Leicester Fields, and Quin had to make an apology to the waiting audience for the non-appearance of 'Lady Fanciful,' and explain what had happened. The next day she and her lover posted off to York, where Metham took an elegant house for her in Trinity Lane. But the amorous gentleman seems to have acted after the usual manner of his kind, and George Anne was regretfully compelled to admit that, though she remained there seven months, her ardent lover did not favour her with his company during that period for more than seven weeks, and she was glad to relieve her solitude by cultivating the society of the nuns in a neighbouring convent. After a son (registered as George Metham) had been born, she received a letter from her old friend Quin, saying that if she returned to London he would secure her an engagement at £7 a week and a free benefit, a proposal which Metham, who now wished to be in London on his own account, urged her to accept. She accordingly came up, reappeared at Covent Garden, and met with a success so far beyond her own or anybody else's expectation as to inflame the jealousy of her old rival Mistress Woffington, who soon seized the occasion of being refused an extra benefit she had asked for as a justification for marching off in high dudgeon for Dublin.

Metham took a large house in King Street, St. James's, set up an equipage, and altogether lived in a style which would have required twice his means to keep up. She still had hopes that he intended to marry her; and as he allowed his two nephews and his niece to live with her, while his sister and other members of his family visited the house, other ladies of her acquaintance made no objection to renew their visits, and she considered herself to be on a very satisfactory footing. Unfortunately, however, Metham had a

passion for play, and George Anne had contracted a taste for expensive living, a taste which she indulged to the full without thinking for a moment that she was not as much entitled so to do as any of the persons of quality with whom she associated. She had once more become reconciled to Lord Tyrawley, and took an additional house at Richmond in order to be near him. For a time, this was not only pleasant, but not inconvenient; for, while his lordship was in funds, she could always draw upon him in an emergency, and, notwithstanding her handsome salary, the large profits of her benefit, and Metham's liberality, which she admits to have been 'unlimited,' her expenditure was so reckless that she frequently found herself without a guinea. Her house at Richmond was always crowded with visitors, and she had staying with her as permanent inmates, in addition to the members of her own family, the widow of Mr. Delany, and a Miss Holroyd, daughter of Lord Frederick Cavendish, who afterwards appeared with great *éclat* upon the stage. Amongst other amusements, she and her friends treated the inhabitants of Richmond to performances of *Andromaque*, *Zaïre*, *Athalie*, and other French plays—a mode of entertainment which cost her something like £300. But Metham's liberality could not continue 'unlimited' for ever. After having a 'bad run' at Scarborough, he wrote to her saying that he could no longer afford to keep up the house in King Street; that his father remained inflexible; that as his own return to town was very uncertain, she had better take a temporary lodging until he and Major Barton had found some means to extricate themselves from their present difficulties; and he added that he had seen Garrick, who was anxious to enrol her in his company. About the same time, Lord Tyrawley, who had been appointed Governor of Gibraltar, was on the point of leaving England, though even had he remained, she admits that his own love of

expense was rapidly putting it out of his power any longer to support hers. She was therefore temporarily thrown back on her own unaided resources; and professes to have given some thought to her pecuniary position. The first thing she did was to take a furnished house in Frith Street, Soho; and, as there was nothing to be done at the moment in London, she determined to pay a visit to Tunbridge Wells, then in the height of its season; so she sent down to engage lodgings at Mount Sion—a place which, she could not help remembering, would, but for her grandmother's imprudent marriage, have become her own property. Before she left Richmond, one of her acquaintances there, the Marquis de Verneuil, had promised to introduce her to the French court if she would pay a visit to Paris during the ensuing summer, and for some time her mind was obsessed by the idea that she was destined to make a conquest of the Grand Monarque himself. The brilliant prospects which were conjured up by this altogether groundless anticipation seem to have acted as a solvent on her newly-formed principles of economy; for she added four bright bays to her own two horses, and drove down to Tunbridge Wells, accompanied by her maid and footman, in a coach and six. She had hardly arrived when she received a visit from Mr. St. Leger—the gentleman, it will be remembered, who had been censured by the Lord-Lieutenant for his unbecoming behaviour to her in the Dublin theatre. He was now engaged to be married to her old friend, Miss Butler, and came to inquire, on behalf of his prospective mother-in-law, whether the young lady who had arrived in such splendid style and was evidently bent on making herself very conspicuous, were really married to Mr. Metham or not. If not, he was instructed to say that neither Mrs. Butler nor her daughter, to their profound regret, would be able to take any notice of her, and as the numerous Irish gentry and nobility who were then at the

Wells would doubtless follow this example, her position there could not be anything but an extremely uncomfortable one. George Anne smothered her chagrin as well as she could; but neither at the time nor afterwards did she impugn the justice of this rebuff. Some other friends, who were not so particular, called on her in the evening, when she added to her misfortune by losing £200 at cards. Next morning there was no alternative but a return to London; and, after paying for her lodging, she drove off in her coach and six with but a solitary half-guinea in her purse. She might have secured a very lucrative engagement at Covent Garden if she had not been too hasty; but when Lacy called on her soon after her arrival in Soho, and falsely assured her that Quin had quitted the stage, while Mrs. Cibber had been engaged for Covent Garden, she at once signed an agreement with him to play for the next three years at Drury Lane at the comparatively poor salary of £300 a year. In the meantime, the theatres not being yet open, she and General Wall, and Count Haslang, the Bavarian Ambassador, agreed to set up a 'Pharaoh' bank together, her diamonds being pawned to provide her share of the capital. They engaged Goundu, the most eminent cook of his time; and their convivial parties drew such numbers of the gay, fluttering, unthinking people of fashion to their tables that (as of course the bank always won) she declares that if her unfortunate theatrical engagement had not interfered with this more profitable species of playing, she would very soon have realised a fortune. She might have added that such fortune, whatever might have been its extent, would probably have been spent as soon as made. The following season is noted in theatrical history for the battle of the Juliets, both the theatres opening with *Romeo and Juliet*, and Garrick and herself playing at Drury Lane in rivalry with Barry and Mrs. Cibber at Covent Garden, until the tired and disgusted

public plainly showed that the contest must be brought to an end. George Anne seems to have been much impressed, though not particularly pleased, with the dexterity of Garrick's management, to which, she thought, he owed almost as much as to his acting. One of his tricks of the trade she describes as follows:—

‘He used to send Mr. Varney, the housekeeper, round among the ladies of quality to inform them as a favour that his master played such a part on such a night; to which Mr. Varney used to add—“and, if possible, I will secure a box for your ladyship.” I have been present when he has called on ladies with this story, who have acknowledged themselves much obliged to him for his intelligence, and have given him a guinea for this particular mark of attention, exclusive of the usual present at Christmas for his benefit. And this he has done at the time when, to my certain knowledge, there has not been one box really engaged in the book for the night of performance he has mentioned.’

Metham was now again in London with her; but she says she had very little of his company, as ‘he was generally at White’s, or some other coffee-house, losing his money.’ January the 30th being his birthday, and there being no performance at the theatre, she gave a ‘gala’ to his friends and her own, sending to Goundu to dress the dinner, and, with characteristic extravagance, giving Robinson, the confectioner, *carte blanche* as to the dessert. Metham brought with him on this occasion a Mr. John Calcraft, a young man of about her own age, whom Henry Fox had recently made an intermediary between the chiefs of the army and the paymaster-general, and of whom in the course of this history we shall hear a good deal more. Somebody present happening to remark on the extraordinary sumptuousness of the dessert, the hostess pleasantly replied that she had no immediate fear of having to pay a visit to the new debtors’ prison in St. George’s Fields in consequence, though if ever she should get there, she hoped some one or other of them

would come to the rescue. Whereupon, to the astonishment of everybody, Metham rose, in a sudden fit of anger, and declared that she might rot there before he would release her. George Anne was not the sort of young woman to stand an insult like that, even from the man to whom she was so ultra-romantically devoted, and with corresponding heat she instantly renounced him, and declared, in presence of the whole company, that she would have nothing more to do with him, even if he should go down on his knees and implore her to marry him. It was generally supposed that Metham was actuated by jealousy, especially concerning her friendship with Lord Downe (who was one of the party present); but she asserts most emphatically that she had never given him the slightest cause for jealousy during the whole time she remained under his protection. Her friendship with Lord Downe, however, must have been of a pretty intimate character; for when, a few days after this scene, a packet was left at her house containing ten bank notes for £100 each, she at once credited that young nobleman with being the anonymous donor.

Mr. Calcraft seems to have improved the occasion, and insinuated himself into her confidence. As he was a notable man of business, she gradually came to consult him about her affairs, and among other things she told him about the £1000 in the blank cover, and asked whether in his opinion she was justified in using the money. He advised her to put it away as a resource for a rainy day; which she did. Then, after a short interval, he proposed marriage; but she refused him. Metham was eager for a reconciliation, but, although nobody, she declares, ever supplanted him in her affections, she was at this time too deeply offended to hold any communication with him. Calcraft, in a roundabout manner, conveyed the false information to her mother that Metham had consoled himself with another charmer, and while George Anne was

smarting under the effect of this intelligence (which of course her mother promptly communicated to her), the astute young man again pressed his matrimonial proposals. He could not marry her at once, he explained, because of his dependence on Henry Fox, who was averse to his doing so; but he offered to sign a contract of marriage (which he brought with him ready drawn up), by which he engaged, under a forfeit of £50,000, to make her his wife within six or seven years; and at length she consented. She afterwards discovered that the stories she had heard about Metham were entirely of Calcraft's invention, and that her former lover, who would not marry her when he had the opportunity, was now frantic because another man had made it impossible for him to do so. However, it was no use crying over spilt milk, and after spending the summer at Twickenham in a little house with the big name of Raymond's Castle, she removed with Calcraft to his London residence, and settled down as 'his domesticated wife.' When he told her the amount of his income, she was greatly surprised to find it hardly equal to her own; but on his asking how much their joint-housekeeping would require, she answered without much consideration, one hundred guineas a quarter; and on his immediately agreeing to allow that sum, she for a time thought no more of the matter. But before settling down with him, she used the ten £100 bank notes to pay her debts; and she went to her new lord and master, she declares, not only free of all encumbrance, but possessed of a good deal of plate and of more diamonds than private gentlewomen can generally boast of. She now thought it well to alter her theatrical style from 'Miss' to 'Mrs.' Bellamy; but in private she was called Mrs. Calcraft, and it was generally supposed that he had married her. She devoted herself with much assiduity to forwarding his business interests, and it was through her influence that he acquired the agencies for Lord Tyrawley,

Sir John Mordaunt, General Campbell, General Braddock, and other army officers.

The connection with Calcraft caused no interruption to her theatrical career, except for such few intervals as the cares of maternity necessitated ; and her popularity was such that we hear of her clearing as much as £1100 by a benefit ; when Lord Kildare, Lord Granby, Mr. Fox, and Mr. Digby paid £100 each for their tickets, according to the custom of the time. She boasts also that she became the sole dictatress of fashion among the fine ladies of the period, being consulted by everybody concerning their birthday or fancy-ball costumes. Instead of having her theatrical costumes bought for her, the proprietors of the theatre made her an allowance in cash ; and this circumstance gave rise on one occasion to a pretty squabble with her rival, Peg Woffington. George Anne had got her dressmaker to buy for her in Paris two of the 'most elegant' tragedy dresses that money could procure, the ground of one being a rich purple, of the other a deep yellow. A revival of Lee's *Alexander*, in which she was to play Statira and Peg Woffington Roxana, promised to afford an admirable opportunity for showing off this new finery. Rich had bought a dress from the wardrobe of the Princess Dowager of Wales for Roxana, which, as it was not at all soiled, looked very beautiful by daylight, but which, being of a straw colour, seemed only a dirty white by candle-light, especially when in juxtaposition with George Anne's splendid deep yellow. As soon as Mistress Woffington caught sight of her rival attired in such magnificent finery, she grew white with rage and magisterially observed, 'I desire, madam, you will never more upon any account wear those clothes in the piece we perform to-night.' To which George Anne loftily replied, 'I know not, madam, by what right you take upon you to dictate to me what I shall wear.' Mrs. Woffington then entreated her in a somewhat softer strain ; and

George Anne promised that she would not wear that eclipsing yellow gown on the following evening. But when Statira appeared on the following night even more resplendent in her new purple robe, the fury of Roxana knew no bounds, and, seizing an opportunity which the play afforded, she drove the rival queen off the carpet, and stabbing viciously at her with the theatrical dagger, nearly succeeded in giving her the *coup de grâce* behind the scenes. As may be supposed, George Anne promptly retaliated by donning both the yellow and the purple costumes on every available occasion; and the green-room was frequently the scene of violent recriminations. On one occasion when Mrs. Bellamy's friend Count Haslang happened to be present, Roxana sarcastically remarked that it was well for her she had a *minister* to supply her extravagance with jewels and such like paraphernalia; to which Statira instantly retorted that she was sorry even *half the town* could not furnish her rival with a supply equal to that of the minister so illiberally hinted at. This was a Parthian shot, for she assures us that had not Count Haslang adroitly covered her precipitate retreat, she would probably have appeared in the next scene with two black eyes instead of the blue ones which nature had given her. This lively quarrel became sufficiently well known to justify Foote in producing a little farce, entitled *The Green-Room Squabble; or a Battle Royal between the Queen of Babylon and the Daughter of Darius*, in which both these belligerent ladies received a well-merited punishment.

Calcraft's business grew with astonishing rapidity; and when he had removed to a house in Parliament Street, and his servants and clerks numbered upwards of thirty, he agreed to allow £2500 a year for table expenses. Previous to that date, George Anne declares that her household expenses had been three times as much as he had allowed.

She boasts that her company now included a Dodington, a Lyttelton, a Mallet, 'the modern Aristophanes,' and, in fact, all the wits of the age; and, what was still more flattering to her pride, 'females of the first rank, and those *exemplary patterns of rectitude*, admitted me to their privacy.' Having such associates, she was ambitious to pose as a woman of culture; and her account of her intellectual proficiency is highly amusing.

'I resolved to study philosophy, and endeavour, if I could not arrive at the honour of being the first, to be the second female Newton. For this purpose I visited the observatory at Flamstead House; constantly attended Martin's lectures; and soon became acquainted with the Ram, the Bull, the Lion, the Scorpion, and all the constellations. Having acquired a knowledge of astronomy, I do not know whether I should not have become an adept in every branch of natural philosophy, had not my humanity stood in the way. For upon seeing a cat tortured in an air-pump, of which, though an animal I have the greatest dislike to, I could not bear to behold the convulsive struggles, I left the pursuit of philosophy, and turned my thoughts to politics.'

So she started reading Grotius, Puffendorf, and other authorities on jurisprudence, and sought to acquire a knowledge of the laws of nations, as though she were about to be appointed Ambassador to one of the first Courts of Europe. How long she continued to pursue these abstruse studies we are not informed; but like certain advocates of woman's rights in our own day, whose political and philosophical acquirements may be equally extensive and deep, her progress was sufficient to assure her that 'the boasted superiority of the men over our sex in the endowments of the mind is a mere commonplace vaunt.' But if we can scarcely credit her with being much of a natural philosopher and jurist, she appears to have been a capable enough woman of business; and when Calcraft was laid up for a time at Bath by an attack of gout, she conducted the army-agency

business with diligence and despatch. In business, however, as in natural philosophy, humanity sometimes stood in the way, the following being an instance very much to her credit:—

‘The spring before, hearing repeated complaints from the army in Germany that the shirts of the common soldiers came unsewed the first time they were washed, and that their shoes and stockings were made in as bad a manner, my philanthropy prompted me to endeavour to remedy this imposition on the poor fellows. I accordingly made inquiry into the affair, and finding that an addition of a penny for making the shirts and threepence per pair in the shoes and in the stockings would be of more than proportionate advantage, I agreed with the contractor . . . to allow him that additional price for all that were sent to Germany to the regiments Mr. Calcraft was agent to.’

Mr. Calcraft, however, like some other army contractors we have heard of, considered humanity a hindrance to business, and left George Anne to pay out of her own money the bill for £900 which this act of common kindness entailed. Lord Granby on his return from Germany gave her £100 towards it, and Henry Fox (who was accumulating a fortune of millions by what the paymaster could screw out of the forces) gave a similar paltry sum. But the poor private soldier blessed her, and the sentries presented arms whenever she afterwards passed through the Park.

From 1752 to 1760 (of course she does not condescend to mention the dates, but they may be otherwise ascertained), George Anne was ‘Mrs. Calcraft’ in the daytime, and ‘Mrs. Bellamy’ in the evening, or whenever the theatre was open. In 1758, as Boswell records, when Garrick and Dodsley had a quarrel over the latter’s *Cleone*, Dr. Johnson went, on the first night, to support the author, when he gave it as his opinion that the acting of Bellamy ‘left nothing to be desired.’ He even expressed his intention of writing a copy of encomiastic verses on her. He had previously taken

some notice of her during the rehearsal of the piece; and she relates how when she came to repeat the words *Thou shalt not murder*, he caught her roughly by the arm, saying, 'It is a commandment, and must be spoken, "Thou shalt *not* murder."' The popular actress, who had not then been introduced to the great Cham, was much displeased at the way in which her uncouth critic enforced his instructions. In her conception of this character she took a line in opposition to both author and manager; and she also defied one of the absurd stage conventions of the day by playing the part without a hoop. It was then the custom for even nuns to be represented on the stage with hoops to their petticoats, and powder in their hair. But her boldness was justified by success. The days of strict attention to propriety of costume were as yet far off. Empresses and Queens usually wore black velvet dresses, and upon special occasions sported the additional finery of an embroidered petticoat. The younger females and secondary characters wore the cast-off gowns of persons of quality—frequently much soiled. The male part of the *dramatis personæ*, whether representing modern bucks or ancient heroes, strutted about in tarnished laced coats and waistcoats, full-bottom or tie wigs, and black worsted stockings. But the transition to our modern somewhat painful archæological accuracy was already beginning to be visible; and George Anne notes that she once saw Le Quin on the French stage in the character of Orestes, fawning a little Spanish hat and feather between his hands, when every other part of his dress was truly Grecian. She was evidently regarded as an expert in all matters of costume, and was consulted by the players concerning their stage dress, as well as by fine ladies about their birthday costumes. One day at Covent Garden, Ross came to her and asked how he should dress for the character of the Roman Emperor in *The Prophetess*. Among other things, she advised a wig as closely

resembling a head of hair as possible. Ross demurred to this, saying, that in Rich's opinion he ought to wear a full-bottomed wig. George Anne ironically observed that a full-bottomed wig would certainly make him very conspicuous, and that he might make himself even more so by wearing a hoop under his lamberkins. Ross took this sarcasm quite seriously, and made himself up into such a grotesque figure that his appearance set the whole house in a roar. Not long after this ridiculous exhibition, the custom of dressing Greek and Roman heroes in full-bottomed perukes was altogether abandoned.

A considerable part of Miss Bellamy's *Apology* is taken up with an account of her quarrels and squabbles with other performers. It would be wearisome to relate in detail all her battles with Peg Woffington; but a squabble with the illiterate Mrs. Hamilton makes a rather amusing story. When George Anne was playing 'Statira' in *The Rival Queens* for Mrs. Hamilton's benefit on a wet afternoon, the heat of the house and the dripping clothes of the audience sent forth odours rather less sweet than those of Araby, so that she was glad to hold a handkerchief drenched in lavender-water over her nose. This caused Ross, who played 'Alexander,' to inquire why she hid her face from him whilst he was paying homage to her queenship. She answered that the people smelt so strongly like tripe that she was nearly suffocated. Ross (who perhaps owed her a grudge for having caused him to cut the ridiculous figure already mentioned) mischievously told 'Roxana' that 'Statira' said her audience *stank*; and Mrs. Hamilton, greatly enraged at this indignity thrown on the worthy friends who had come in the wet to attend her benefit, determined to take the earliest opportunity that afforded to mortify Mrs. Bellamy. Accordingly, when the latter's benefit arrived, she sent word at the last moment that she

would not play her part of Lady Graveairs, so that an apology had to be made, and the audience requested to wait while another actress dressed for the part. But George Anne's friends and admirers would not allow a public affront like this to pass without retaliation; and the very next night, as soon as Mrs. Hamilton came on as the Queen in *The Spanish Friar*, she was greeted with a storm of hisses. When this tumult abated for a moment, Mrs. Hamilton advanced and treated the protesting audience to the following choice little speech:—'Gemmen and ladies! I suppose as how you hiss me because I did not play at Mrs. Bellamy's benefit. I would have performed; but she said as how my audience *stunk*, and were all *tripe* people.' When the fair orator had got thus far, the audience exploded in a shout of merriment. A wag called out, 'Well said, Tripe!' and *Tripe* was a nickname which stuck to the lady as long as she was connected with the theatre.

Her relations with Calcraft were not altogether of the most amicable description. After the birth of a daughter in 1752, he settled an estate at Grantham worth £120 a year on her for life and on the girl after her. Later on, he bought a house standing in eleven acres of ground near Bromley in Kent, which he said he intended to dispose of in a similar fashion; and she claims to have spent some £600 of her own money in beautifying it. When, however, after their removal to Parliament Street, she showed him unpaid bills to the amount of £1300 for expenses incurred in their former house, he refused to pay, on the ground that she ought to have managed well enough with her large salary and the allowance which he had made her. He also asked what had become of those ten bank-notes for £100 each which she had received in the blank cover, and, greatly to her astonishment, asserted that he was the anonymous donor. As Lord Downe had since died, she could prove

nothing to the contrary, but she never credited Calcraft's assertion. Some time after this, when one of her numerous admirers made her a present of a set of beautiful horses, Calcraft refused to be at the expense of their keep; and when she went on a visit to France, although, she says, he was glad enough for her to go, because just then he had a particular fancy for a lady of easy virtue named Lucy Cooper, he would not be at the expense of her journey, and she had to borrow for the purpose from her friend Miss Meredith. In fact, she was always borrowing. She borrowed altogether £1200 of Miss Meredith; when tradesmen pressed for payment for additions she had made to her already large stock of jewelry, she borrowed 'some hundreds' of Mr. Sparks; when it was necessary to repay Mr. Sparks, she raised £500 from a Jew money-lender, on condition of paying him £100 a year for life out of her annuity from Calcraft; and in 1759 she had to pawn her jewels for £2000 in order to pay certain pressing creditors and provide the funds for a visit to Brussels and the Hague. She admits, and there is no doubt about it whatever, that she was habitually extravagant. But she was also particularly unfortunate in her pecuniary affairs. On one occasion her cousin, Crawford, a solicitor whom she had trusted to act for her, cheated her out of £500 and some valuable diamond earrings. And even when a fortune of £50,000 was left her, she never received a penny of the money. This last-named disaster must have been peculiarly mortifying both to Calcraft and herself. He burst into her room one day in a state of great excitement and read an advertisement from a newspaper to the effect that Mr. Thomas Sykes (who was a brother-in-law of Captain Bellamy, and had once met George Anne at the house of a cousin) had died in the south of France and left money in the English funds and some property at the Hague to 'Miss Bellamy, belonging to one of the

theatres.' A firm of solicitors in London, who possessed a draft or a copy of the will, confirmed the advertisement, estimated the bequest at £50,000, and told her that the original will was expected to be brought over to England together with the body of Mr. Sykes (who had desired to be buried at Westminster), by the servant who had been in attendance on him in France. But that servant, being apparently desirous of appropriating to himself the money and effects which Mr. Sykes had with him at the time of his death, left his master's mortal remains where they were, and disappeared with whatever valuables he could lay hands upon. In consequence, the will was never recovered, and poor George Anne never saw a penny of her £50,000. Some years after, when in Holland, she learnt that as no legal claimant had appeared for the property at the Hague, it had lapsed to the States.

Calcraft, it appears, had always avoided any discussion on the subject of his marriage-contract; but it was not until 1759 that she found out the reason why. Then, some few days after the birth of a son, a lady friend informed her that, many years before, Calcraft had married a young woman, who was still living with her relations in his native town of Grantham. The shock of hearing this at such a time threw her into a fever, and for a long time she was dangerously ill. It is a curious illustration of the height to which party spirit was carried by the mercenary politicians of that time when we are told that, although George Anne's physician had failed to discover the nature of her disorder, Dr. Lucas, a man of great professional merit, could only be introduced to her bedside by stealth, because his political principles were opposed to those of Calcraft. When she had become convalescent, after a visit to Bristol, she proposed to live with her mother instead of returning to Calcraft's house; but on his imploring her to return, and

promising to pay all her debts within three months, she took up her quarters with him once more. But their relations were evidently strained; and before long she accepted an engagement to play for a season at Mossop's theatre in Dublin. Her remuneration was to be a thousand guineas and two benefits; but there were debts to be settled before she could leave London, so the pawntickets of her jewels were handed over to Calcraft as security for an advance of £2400. He wrote to her afterwards, addressing her as 'My dearest Georgiana,' and signing himself, 'Yours ever and ever'; but she does not appear to have answered, or ever to have seen him again. Though not in strict chronological sequence, it may be convenient to state here the conclusion of her relations with Calcraft. In 1767 she put an advertisement in the papers stating that there would speedily be published 'a letter from G. A. Bellamy to John Calcraft, Esq.,' with this motto:

'So comes the reck'ning when the banquet's o'er,
The dreadful reck'ning, and men smile no more.'

But Calcraft somehow found means to have this explosive letter suppressed, and it did not see the light until her *Apology* appeared, thirteen years after his death. Among other things she charges Calcraft with having hired a hack writer to produce a scurrilous publication, wherein their separation was stated to have been caused by her gallantries with Lord Harrington and others; an accusation sufficiently refuted by the tenor of his letters to her written while she was in Dublin. She also charges him with having deceived her at the outset by false statements concerning Metham; with having given her a fraudulent contract of marriage when he had a wife living; with not having paid her debts according to promise; with having taken her jewels out of pawn and disposed of them by gift and sale without returning to her the difference of £3000 between their value and

what he had advanced on them. And she draws up a debtor and creditor account between them to the following effect:—

G. A. B. *Dr.* to J. C.

For Bank-notes in blank cover, ...	£1000
„ Payment towards ball on daughter's birthday, ...	105
„ Picture in miniature (a present), ...	20
„ Second-hand gold repeater, ...	35
„ New setting of diamond sprig, ...	90
„ Annuity of £120 (none ever paid), ...	...
„ In consideration of giving up contract bond, and dropping action for value of diamonds, ...	200
„ Annuity of £100 paid for 4 years, ...	400
„ Alleged expenses of illnesses (C.'s estimate), ...	900
	£2750

She allows his claim to have been the donor of the ten £100 bank-notes because, owing to Lord Downe's death, she cannot disprove it; and she explains that she gave up his marriage-contract bond, and dropped her claim for £3000 difference in value of jewels in return for £200 down and an additional annuity of £100 a year. While in her contra account she makes no claim for six years of slavery and four years of misery; nor for having saved his books and furniture and £1300 in cash from the hands of the mob when his house in Channel Row took fire.

J. C. *Dr.* to G. A. B.

Annuity of £120, which should have been paid for 16 years, ...	£1,920
Difference on diamonds, ...	3,000
Eight years' receipts from theatres expended while in his house, ...	9,600
General Braddock's agency (4 years at £300), ...	1,200
Legacy left to J. C. by General Braddock on the assumption that she and Calcraft were married, ...	7,000

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Lord Tyrawley's agency (7 years at £500),	. 3,500
General Mordaunt's agency (6 years at £300),	. 1,800
General Lascelles' agency (9 years at £300),	. 2,700
Five coach, and two saddle horses,	. 250
A Town chariot, quite new,	. 147
Paid for champagne ordered for Lord Granby,	. 80
Expended on Calcraft's brother (Captain C.) at the Academy, etc.,	. 350
Paid for clothes for Calcraft's sister during 6 years,	. 400
Mrs. Jordan's bill for real necessities,	. 160
Laid out on the building, hot-houses, etc., at Hollwood,	. 400
	£32,507

According to all this, he remained her debtor in the sum of £29,757, and her letter concludes by requesting a draft for the amount to conclude all transactions between them. What Calcraft might have had to say in reply we have no means of knowing; but in any case the publication of such a letter in 1767 would have been very damaging to him, and he undoubtedly did well in getting it suppressed. When he died in 1772, after having accumulated a princely fortune, and come within measurable distance of a peerage, he bequeathed to Miss Bride, an actress who had succeeded Miss Bellamy in his affections, two annuities, one of £500 and one of £1000. He also left £10,000 to each of his children by Miss Bride and by Miss Bellamy. But he did not leave George Anne anything, or even mention her name except as the mother of two of the children; and an action which she brought against his executors for the payment of the annuity previously agreed upon was not decided in her favour until the year of her death, too late for her to receive any of the money. Curiously enough, Calcraft omitted to mention in his will the name of the wife, to whom, as we have seen, he had been secretly married, and that omission

enabled her to have the will set aside, and to claim one-third of his personal estate.

The engagement with Mossop in Dublin lasted only through the season of 1760-1. Mr. Joseph Knight, in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, erroneously states that, according to her own confession, she had now, at little over thirty years of age, lost all her former beauty and power of attraction. What she did say was that when she arrived at Dublin she had been sea-sick for four days, and had not had time even to wash and change her dress, so that a crowd of students from the college who waited round the door of her house to see the celebrated beauty arrive, saw her under a temporary eclipse.

‘At length I stepped out of the coach. The long-expected phenomenon now made her appearance. But oh, how different a figure from what their imagination had depicted! Fashion to yourself the idea of a little dirty creature, bent nearly double, enfeebled by fatigue, her countenance tinged by the jaundice, and in every respect the reverse of a person who could make the least pretensions to beauty. . . . So great was their surprise and disappointment that they immediately vanished, and left me to crawl into the house, without admiration or molestation.’

It is true that Tate Wilkinson, who was in Dublin at this time, describes her as looking somewhat hollow-eyed and haggard; but there is more evidence to show that for some years after this her beauty and attractiveness remained unimpaired. John O’Keeffe, who saw a good deal of her at this period, notes in his *Recollections*, not only that her acting gave him great delight, but that she was ‘very beautiful.’ He adds also that he often saw her splendid state sedan-chair, with its superb silver-lace liveries, waiting for her at the door of Liffey Street Catholic Chapel, and that she was not only remarkable for her beauty and fine acting, but likewise for her charity and humanity. It is

perhaps unnecessary to remark that she continued to be no less remarkable for her extravagance. The company at Mossop's theatre in Smock Alley was a much weaker one than that possessed by the rival house. The latter included such players as Woodward, Barry, and Abington; whereas George Anne's associates reminded her of Falstaff's ragged regiment which had robbed the gallows. The only actor amongst them with the slightest claim to distinction was Digges, a young man of good family, with considerable histrionic talent, a handsome face, a fine figure, and the art of persuading all with whom he came into contact that he was one of the best of men. At first she avoided Digges on account of his reputation for gallantries; but after he had sighed at a distance for a little time, and made his gradual approaches with 'awful respect,' a female friend was permitted to introduce him, and he was received as one of her regular visitors. Shortly after his introduction he fell ill, and wrote to say that the cause of his illness was a consuming passion for her. Just at this time her old admirer, Crump, from whom she had been ordering goods on credit pretty freely, went bankrupt, and his business and book debts were taken over by a man named Coates, who happened to have an interest in the rival theatre. Coates, having also, apparently, something of a spite against Mrs. Bellamy for having proved so great an attraction at the other house, contrived to have her arrested for the sum due to Crump, and gave orders to have the capture effected one evening while she was on her way to the theatre, so as to spoil at any rate one night's performance. The money was forthcoming the following morning, and so also was the indignant Digges, who promptly rose from his sick-bed, and gave the malicious Coates so severe a drubbing that, to avoid the consequences thereof, it was necessary for the actor to absent himself from Dublin

for a while. Before he went he wrote to Mrs. Bellamy earnestly requesting an interview with her.

‘I consented. When his attractions, his sufferings, gratitude, pity, and a predilection in his favour, all joined to induce me to enter into a *serious* connection with him. This, though not binding by the laws of the country to a person of my religious persuasion, was notwithstanding valid to all intents and purposes. And the connection, in consequence, made us mutually unhappy during the two years we lived together.’

It is difficult to make head or tail of this cryptic utterance. And when George Anne goes on to add that she believed herself doomed to be unhappy in every union she formed, one can only wonder that she continued to form one after another in such rapid succession. In fact, her conduct only becomes intelligible if we can suppose her to have acted from the same motive as a certain convicted bigamist, who, when asked by the judge what he meant by marrying six young women and deserting them all within as many months, replied that he was trying to find a good one. She does not say that Digges turned out a particularly bad one; but he had his drawbacks, as will presently be seen. In the summer of 1761, finding that Mossop was unable to pay all that was due to her, she had to borrow £400, and she incidentally informs us that at that time her total debts amounted to no less a sum than £10,300. She appears to have been perpetually in receipt of ‘offers’; one admirer at this period offering £1000 down to be admitted as a favourite lover; but, notwithstanding calumnious reports to the contrary, we are assured that ‘I never, even in thought, deviated from the duty I owed, as I imagined, to Mr. Digges, while the union between us existed.’ But as her situation was becoming untenable, she quietly left Dublin one day and crossed over to England, where Digges overtook her in a post-chaise, and the adventurous couple

journeyed north to Edinburgh. They met with considerable success in the Scottish capital, and Digges (who had found it convenient to assume the name of Bellamy for a time) did everything in his power to make her happy, although continual demands on him for debts which he had contracted previous to their union, and which had now to be met out of their common purse, rather soured her temper at times. When, in the course of the following season, the Hon. Mrs. Digges died, leaving £8000 between her two sons on condition that the elder should retire from the stage and take her maiden name of West, Digges promptly set off for England, taking with him all the ready cash she could conveniently spare, and a trifle more. She had gone through some form of marriage with Digges; but soon after his departure for London, a friend sent her well-authenticated intelligence that the gentleman had a wife still living. But as Mrs. Digges had announced her own death in the public papers in order to deceive her husband, George Anne altogether acquitted him of intentionally deceiving her in the matter.

We know, not only from her own account, but from independent testimony, that Mrs. Bellamy had always been lavish both of her money and of her influence in helping others. But looking back over her whole life, she could remember only two persons who ever showed her any practical proofs of gratitude for favours received. Both those persons came to the rescue during her residence in Edinburgh. A Mr. Hearne, whom she had recommended to Calcraft as a clerk, and who had since prospered exceedingly in the West Indies, sent her a present of £200. And about the same time, an old servant of hers named Daniel Douglas came up to her in the street and asked for an appointment at her house on very special business. She had had to get rid of Douglas some years before because all her maids were

much too partial to the gay Lothario; but she had interested herself to get him a better situation in the service of Lord Hume, who, when Governor of Gibraltar, had made Douglas his major-domo. Her old servant now informed her that his savings, together with a handsome legacy from Lord Hume, amounted to £1100; that he and his wife were just on the point of taking possession of an inn for which they were to pay £700, and that the object of his present visit was to beg her acceptance of the remaining £400. She could not bring herself to accept the worthy man's offer, and he took his leave apparently as much mortified by her refusal of his money as most people would have been at being dunned for the sum. But she accepted Mr. Hearne's £200, and also applied to him over and over again for further assistance. She could not altogether escape from her London creditors even in Edinburgh; but luckily for her the only suit which was brought against her in the Scottish courts failed, on the ground that the security had been fraudulently obtained. Of her Edinburgh theatrical experiences we hear comparatively little, though she tells one good story which would be incredible of any but a dour Scottish performer. Mrs. Kennedy was to have played Zara in *The Mourning Bride* for the benefit of some one she wished to befriend, but about four o'clock on the day of the performance was taken so ill that her appearance became impossible. In this dilemma, a sister who was twenty years older than herself, and totally unfit for anything but the parts of old nurses, etc., which she usually played, undertook to supply Mrs. Kennedy's place.

'The audience expressed marks of disapprobation throughout the whole of her playing, but particularly so when she died. Upon which she rose from between the mutes, and advancing towards the front of the stage, she told the audience that she was concerned she could not acquit herself so as to give satisfaction ;

but as good-nature had induced her to undertake the part, merely to serve the person whose benefit it was, she hoped they would excuse it. Having finished her speech, she hastened to the place from whence she had risen, and threw herself down again between the mutes, who covered her face with the veil. So uncommon an incident had such an effect upon the risible muscles of the whole audience, as well as myself, who was just entering as Almeria, that it was impossible to compose them for the rest of the evening.'

Some enthusiasts at Glasgow had built a theatre there, and invited Mrs. Bellamy and her company to give them a series of performances; so, sending on their scenery and dresses in advance, they set out on what they hoped would prove a profitable trip. No sooner had they arrived in Glasgow, however, than they found that a fanatical mob had burned the new theatre overnight, together with George Anne's wardrobe and effects, which she valued at £900. On her return to Edinburgh after this disaster, she found an execution in the house for a debt which Digges had left unpaid, and being at the same time unable to discharge her own debts in Edinburgh, she borrowed another £200 from her friend Hearne, and determined to return at all hazards to London. But she soon found that £200 was insufficient to discharge her Edinburgh liabilities, and, failing other resource, she had the assurance to write to her old lover, now become Sir George Metham, for assistance. He not only sent her the sum she asked for by return of post, but also invited her to spend a few days at his seat in Yorkshire, where her (and his) son was then staying for the holidays. On her arrival he welcomed her with great cordiality, and as soon as he learned that she was still in debt to the extent of several thousand pounds, made a proposal to sell one of his estates in order that he might extricate her, and at the same time extricate himself from similar difficulties. In the meantime he promised to make her an allowance of

seven guineas a week, though he took an early opportunity to inform her that during the distraction caused by their separation he had bound himself by the most sacred vows never more to have any 'tender connection' with her. George Anne accepted the situation—and the money.

'I own [she writes] the satisfaction I received from finding myself thus reconciled to the person on whom I first bestowed my heart was very great. A series of the most complicated treachery had induced me to use him ill at the very time I preferred him to his whole sex, and the assurance of his future friendship was flattering in the extreme.'

She also persuaded herself that besides being flattering, and promising to be serviceable, it did her honour! There is little doubt that she hoped her old lover's vows would prove as breakable as the proverbial lover's promises, for she promptly wrote off to Digges (or rather West) to inform him that although she had nothing to reproach him with, they must never meet again.

An engagement at Covent Garden was obtained almost immediately on her arrival in London, and she continued to play there regularly for the following six or seven years. But her creditors at once became troublesome, and in order to save herself from arrest, she got her old friend Count Haslang, the Bavarian ambassador, to take her into his service. He signed a paper setting forth that 'Whereas George Anne Bellamy, my housekeeper, informs me that she has contracted some debts which she is anxious to pay, and as she is offered an engagement at Covent Garden Theatre, I grant her my leave to perform at the said theatre, upon this condition only, that she appropriates her whole salary for the use of her creditors.' For a time Alderman Cracroft received her salary as it became due and distributed it among her creditors; and after he ceased to act, the trusteeship was taken up by her friend Woodward.

She was received in the theatre with great applause, and although (not through any fault of hers, but from bad management, she says) some of her parts were far from successful, her first benefit produced the greatest receipt that had ever been known. From this time, however, her reputation as an actress rapidly declined. How it was that Count Haslang's ambassadorial protection failed her we are not informed; but the remainder of her history consists largely of the recital of her pecuniary difficulties, and innumerable arrests for debt. In 1763 or 1764 Lord Tyrawley died; then her mother died; and in 1772 Calcraft died. Instead of selling an estate to pay her debts, Sir George Metham had fallen out with her almost as soon as he came to London; from what cause she does not say, but it was evidently something which finally determined him to have nothing more to do with her. Her children she seldom saw; Calcraft's son was in the navy, and Metham's son in the army. Both are spoken of as dutiful sons; but her daughter is stigmatised as 'unnatural, and the true daughter of a Calcraft.' For many years she seldom heard of her brother O'Hara, except when he was in want of money. He appears to have been a true son of *his* father, not without natural ability, wit, and bravery, but selfish, callous, and devoted to nothing but his own pleasure. An amusing letter from him, written in December 1775, when he was a lieutenant in the navy, is not only characteristic of the wild young man himself, but throws an interesting sidelight on the peerage and police of the time. After apologising for not coming to supper with her on the previous evening, he gives an account of the frolic which occupied his time. It appears that in company with the Hon. Walsingham Boyle and some other choice spirits, he had been roaming about the city throwing small shot at the windows of unoffending tradesmen, till the whole company were taken up by the watch. When brought before

the night constable, charged with breaking windows and disturbing the King's peace, it so happened that O'Hara was charged first, while his companions were detained in an adjoining room. He denied breaking anything, stating that he had only thrown some harmless sparrow-shot; but the constable told him he was a black-looking dog, with face enough to deny anything, and swear to it afterwards. Then O'Hara, who happened to have in his pocket a key of the Green Park belonging to a noble lord of his acquaintance, bethought himself of a trick. Loftily desiring the constable to treat him with better manners, he enquired if that official could read:—

“Read!” replied he, “ay, and write too, I’d have you to know.”—“I make no doubt, sir, of your erudition,” said I. “Addition!” retorted the gentleman, “yes, fellow! I understand addition, and multiplication too. Don’t insult me upon my office, don’t.”—I then pulled out the key and said—“Then, sir, do me the honour to look on this key.”—“Key! what’s this! a crown and G. R.?”—“Yes, sir, pray take the trouble to read further.”—“Let’s see: R^t with a t at top; what’s that?”—“An abridgement, sir, for *Right*.”—“Don’t tell me of your regiment; I believe you will be found Right Rogues. H. O. N. with an l e a-top! What, the Devil, is this your conjuring key?”—“No, sir, what you have read stands for *Right Honourable*.”—“L and a d a-top; why, this is higgles-grifficks, as neighbour Thompson calls it at our club.”—“You mistake, sir; it is, in the whole, *Right Honourable Lord Henry*——.” Here the constable started; and staring like the sign of the Saracen’s Head, exclaimed, “Oh Lord! oh Lord! watchman! you villain! what have you done? I shall punish you for daring to take up a Lord.”—“Yes, sir,” said I, “and I shall punish you for daring to detain a Peer of the Realm.”—“My Lord, I ask your Lordship’s pardon. I did not know your Lordship’s Worship’s qualification. Oh! you dog of a watchman! Was there no street-walkers, no vagabones, but you must take up a Lord? I shall be in the Tower tomorrow, or in Newgate, I suppose?”—“Well, Sir, now you know my quality I suppose I may depart?”—“Oh, yes. Here, watchman! light his Lordship’s Worship down the steps. Shall he light your honour home, or call a

chair? And I once more beg your Lordship's pardon?"—"Sir, I excuse it, and only desire you would tell your people to be more cautious for the future. And, pray Mr. Constable, a word with you. Those men in the other room I met by accident last night; I took them for gentlemen; but engaging at cards with them I find them sharpers. They have pigeoned me out of my money. Pray secure them, and I'll call in the morning to prosecute them." . . . "Depend upon it, my Lord, I'll secure them."—"Good night, Mr. Constable."—"Good night, my Lord."

The wily O'Hara then went on his way, leaving his comrades in durance vile to get out of the scrape as best they could. When O'Hara's ship was stationed at Gibraltar in 1756, he was received into the best society of the place as the recognised son of the Governor, Lord Tyrawley. But one day he had the imprudence (and impudence) to *hop* along the ball-room, in imitation of his father, who limped in consequence of a wound received in battle; and the old lord never forgave him. A short time after this incident, O'Hara took command of his ship during the captain's illness, and by bravely fighting and dismasting an enemy's vessel of superior force acquired much honour in his profession. But when, on the captain's death, it was proposed to give him the command, Lord Tyrawley made a special request to the admiral that his son should *not* be promoted; and a good many years elapsed before he attained to the position of post-captain.

The last friend with whom Mrs. Bellamy formed a familiar connection was Woodward the actor. They kept house together from about 1767 till 1777, when he died, and she describes him as her 'patron, father, and friend.' He left her by will all his furniture, plate, linen, china, etc., together with a substantial sum which was to be devoted to buying an annuity for her. But there was a lawsuit over the will; and, as in a similar previous case, she got nothing. As long as she remained on the stage, there were squabbles with the

other performers. But we may shrewdly suspect that she reports only those in which she came off victorious. While she was in the King's Bench, Miss Wilford, a rising young actress, had played Cordelia, and other parts usually performed by Mrs. Bellamy. Soon after her release, *King Lear* was announced; and the prompter, without consulting anybody, obliterated Miss Wilford's name from the bills, and inserted that of Mrs. Bellamy. The deputy-manager then came to her, about mid-day, to say this was a mistake, and to ask her to allow Miss Wilford, who was the manager's special protégée, to continue to play the part. But notwithstanding that she distinctly refused, she found that the play-bills were being again altered, and a note added to them saying that the announcement of her name was a mistake. The Bellamy spirit flared up. She instantly sent to have hand-bills printed and distributed among the audience setting forth that she esteemed herself 'the acknowledged child of their favour,' and therefore considered it her duty to *be ready* in case she should that evening be honoured with their preference. The result was that when Miss Wilford appeared on the stage as Cordelia, she was received with a storm of disapprobation which compelled her to retire. Whereupon, George Anne, being ready dressed for the part, at once came on, and was received with a thunder of applause. Another little incident which seems to have greatly pleased her was the administration of a thrilling rebuke to sleeping royalty. The King of Denmark, while on a visit to this country, went to Covent Garden to see *Jane Shore*, and was soon most conspicuously fast asleep in his box.

'Unwilling that he should lose the fine acting it might be supposed he came to see, I drew near his box, and with a most violent exertion of voice (which the part admitted), cried out—"Oh! thou false Lord!" by which I so effectually roused his majesty that he told the unfortunate Count de Bathmore . . . he

would not be married to a woman with such a bell of a voice on any account.'

But a quarrel between Colman and the other proprietors of the theatre put an end to her engagement; and when between forty and fifty years of age she became dependent on her friends. She gave up her apartments and her servant; went to live in a garret at Lambeth; and, having exhausted her credit at a shop in the neighbourhood which for a time supplied her with food, determined to commit suicide. She left the house one night between nine or ten o'clock, and after wandering about St. George's Fields for a time in the hope that some of the freebooters who frequented the place would murder her, she at length descended the steps at Westminster Bridge, and sat down on the lowest stair to wait for the tide to cover her. As she sat there in the darkness, she heard the voice of a child piteously asking for a piece of bread, and the answering wail of a woman, who, after telling the girl there was not even a morsel of bread to carry to her dying father, exclaimed—'My God! my God! what wretchedness can compare to mine! But Thy almighty will be done.' These last words had an electrical effect on the intending suicide. She was struck with horror at the crime she had been about to commit, and burst into tears. Then, feeling in her pocket for a handkerchief and finding a few coppers, she ran up the steps with these to the poor wailing woman; and afterwards walked quietly home, determined to fight her battle out to the end. On the following day Mr. Harris of Covent Garden called on her and gave her five guineas. Then came Mrs. Whitfield, formerly her dresser, who on learning the condition to which she was reduced, at once got up a subscription to supply her late mistress with a guinea a week. Thus encouraged, she applied to Mr. Harris for a benefit; and he generously granted her the house free of expense, as well as interested himself with the performers,

who one and all cheerfully agreed to play for her. Though near midsummer, she says, the house was as crowded with nobility as though it were mid-winter. This was in 1783. But no long time after we hear of further arrests, and of subscriptions to pay off threatening creditors, or to get her out of the King's Bench. And she was not only troubled with duns, but severely afflicted with rheumatism. Count Haslang, who had made her a small allowance ever since she left his service, suddenly died. She advertised, under an assumed name, for a situation as housekeeper, or attendant on an elderly lady or gentleman; but without any success. Then, as a last resource, she sat down, with the assistance of Mr. Bicknell, to compose her *Memoirs*, or, as she called it, an Apology for her life. Before the book could be finished, however, there was the usual trouble; and notwithstanding that her son had settled on her a hundred pounds a year, and the Duchess of Devonshire bestowed on her a small pension, we find her writing to Tate Wilkinson, as she was correcting her proofs, telling him that she would have to take the rules of the King's Bench unless she could pay £29 (which she had no prospect of getting) before the following Saturday. The book came out early in 1785, and had a considerable success; but the profits from its sale were at once appropriated, as far as they would go, to satisfy some of her creditors; and she soon contracted fresh debts, and borrowed more money. The Duchess of Bolton, the Duke of Montagu, the Duke of Rutland, Lord Mansfield, Sir Francis and Lady Basset, and Lady James are mentioned by her as some of the kind patrons who afforded her pecuniary assistance at this period. And on May the 24th the players gave her another benefit. Mrs. Yates, though retired from the stage, performed the part of the *Duchess of Braganza*, and Miss Farren, afterwards Countess of Derby, spoke an address which concluded with the couplet—

‘But see! oppress’d with gratitude and tears,
To pay her duteous tribute she appears.’

‘The curtain then ascended,’ says Frederick Reynolds, who was present, ‘and Mrs. Bellamy being discovered, the whole house immediately rose to mark their favourable inclinations towards her, and from an anxiety to obtain a view of this once celebrated actress, and, in consequence of the publication of her *Life*, then celebrated authoress. She was seated in an arm-chair, from which she in vain attempted to rise, so completely was she subdued by her feelings. She, however, succeeded in muttering a few words expressive of her gratitude, and then sinking into her seat, the curtain dropped before her.’ Such was the last public appearance of the popular actress who, as Boaden says, had once been no mean rival even to Mrs. Cibber herself.

Whatever sum this benefit may have produced was probably swallowed up by her hungry creditors as before. At any rate, within twelve months we find her once again compelled to accept the rules of the King’s Bench. In May 1786 she wrote, from Edith Row, St. George’s Fields, to Tate Wilkinson:—

‘I wrote some months ago to thank you for your ham, but have had no answer. After having parted with my last guinea, and even my necessaries, to avert my present unpleasing residence, I was obliged to draw upon my son, and my lovely patroness the Duchess of Devonshire up to Michaelmas quarter. The impositions are incredible, as the people live by the distress of others. I am obliged to give sixteen shillings a week for an apartment—a chandler’s shop in front, backwards a carpenter’s; and what with the sawing of boards, the screaming of three ill-natured brats, the sweet voice of the lady of the mansion, who is particularly vociferous with all the gossips who owe her a penny, with a coffee-mill which is often in use, and is as noisy as London Bridge when the tide is coming in . . . it is impossible to think of anything; added to this, I have not a place for a servant. Could I raise sufficient to furnish me an apartment I should be tolerably easy, as I have

begun a work which seems to flatter success, though a great undertaking, *The Characters of My Own Times.*'

She goes on to say that she could live at half the expense if she could borrow £30 or £40 for a year, which she would be certain to repay, as it was her intention to live as frugally as possible; and if Tate could manage to see a person she names, perhaps he might stand her friend. From want of exercise, she has now no appetite; and in the matter of apparel she is reduced to one old cotton gown! And so it went on for two more years; until on February the 16th, 1788, Death made the final arrest. Frederick Reynolds says that Mrs. Bellamy was not only a beautiful woman, but a most accomplished actress, and that in the opinion of Quin, Garrick, and other critical contemporaries, she surpassed even Mrs. Woffington in conversational powers. But what a wreck did this charming creature make of her life! It may perhaps be urged that, if there be anything in the theory of heredity, much better conduct could hardly have been expected from the child of such aberrant specimens of humanity as Lord Tyrawley and Miss Seal, to say nothing of the education and example which they both afforded her. But there is little need to comment on the tragic history. Poor, good-natured, unthinking Bellamy (as Tate Wilkinson calls her) has herself sufficiently pointed the moral and adorned the tale.

FRANCES ABINGTON

AFTER Mrs. Abington became a celebrated actress, and was not only allowed to dictate to her contemporaries in matters of dress, but was received in the best fashionable society of her time, it was thought necessary to provide her with a respectable pedigree; and her descent was traced from Charles Barton, Esquire, of Norton in Derbyshire, a gentleman who, about the time of the accession of William the Third, is said to have left four sons, one of whom was a colonel in the army, another a ranger of one of the royal parks, and a third a prebendary of Westminster. The fourth, whose profession is not stated, is claimed as the grandfather of Frances Barton, known to fame as the great comic actress Mrs. Abington. It would probably be impossible either to prove or to disprove this genealogy; but whoever or whatever her grandfather may have been, it is a good deal more certain that her father, after having been a private soldier in the guards, gained a precarious livelihood at a cobbler's stall in Windmill Street, near the Haymarket; and that her brother for many years worked as an ostler in Hanway Yard, Oxford Street. It is quite intelligible that Mrs. Abington, during her lifetime, should desire the lowliness of her parentage and the squalor of her early surroundings, as well as certain other matters which the veracious historian must perforce record, to be unknown or forgotten; but if the early difficulties which distinguished persons have surmounted, and the occasions when (to use Carlyle's phrase) they struck their colours to the Devil,



Frances Arlington

FROM THE ENGRAVING BY WILLIAMSON OF THE PORTRAIT BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

were to be glossed over or concealed, biography would be robbed of half its interest, and more than half its value. It has been thought a matter for some surprise that Mrs. Abington escaped the dubious honour of one of those little biographies such as were dedicated to the doings of Peg Woffington, Mrs. Baddeley, Mrs. Jordan, and other theatrical notabilities, by writers whose principal object seems to have been to drag the frailties of those ladies from their dread abode. The explanation of this rather peculiar circumstance may perhaps be found in some particulars which are given in John Taylor's *Records of my Life* respecting a certain scurrilous writer named Williams, but better known by his pseudonym of 'Anthony Pasquin.' John Taylor tells us that:—

'Among the theatrical performers upon whom this Anthony Pasquin levied contributions was Mrs. Abington; and as this lady had by no means been a votary of Diana in the earlier part of her life, he exercised a double power over her, for if she rejected his applications for pecuniary assistance, he could not only wound her feelings by alluding to scenes which she of course wished to be buried in oblivion, but could bitterly animadvert upon her theatrical exertions while she remained on the stage. Such was her terror of this predatory financier, that she submitted to all his exactions. My friend William Cooke, the old barrister, who was really her friend, endeavoured to rescue her from this thralldom, but in vain. Pasquin invited himself to dine with her whenever he pleased, and always reversed the usual order of things by making her pay for him attending her involuntary invitations.'

This blackmailer sometimes got into trouble with more courageous victims, and once had to fly to America. While he was there his death was reported, and the old barrister, Cooke, congratulated Mrs. Abington on being relieved from all further apprehensions on his account. But she knew the man, and surprised Cooke by the significant query—'But are you sure he *is* dead?' Cooke had no doubts;

but Mrs. Abington's instinct proved to be right; for shortly afterwards Pasquin, having compromised with his pursuers, returned to England, resumed his accustomed methods, and made further demands upon her purse. But even by paying blackmail Mrs. Abington did not altogether prevent the revelation of secrets which she would fain have had buried; for in 1795, during her seven years' absence from the stage, the author of a book entitled *The Secret History of the Green-Room* (who, however, does not appear to have been a writer of the 'Anthony Pasquin' type), having, as he declared, private and accurate personal knowledge of the real facts of the case, set himself to combat and contradict the erroneous accounts of her which had appeared in various magazines. Much of what this writer alleges is confirmed by John Taylor and by Arthur Murphy, both of whom are to be ranked among her admirers and her familiar acquaintances. But the only formal biography of Mrs. Abington that has yet appeared, a compilation made in 1888, seventy-three years after her death, quietly ignores the scandalous part of these revelations; and the *Dictionary of National Biography* follows suit. The consequence is that they miss what is one of the most extraordinary features in Mrs. Abington's career; for not only did this popular actress rise from poverty, squalor, and ignorance, to professional fame and independence, but by her beauty, her wit, her fascinating manner, and by her industry, fortitude, perseverance, and subsequent propriety of conduct, she rose from a deeper depth of degradation to attain the respect and regard, not only of the men, but of some of the most distinguished and worthy of the ladies of quality of her time.

Frances Barton was born in 1731 according to some authorities, in 1737 or 1738 according to others. Her father's earnings were too small to provide her with any regular education, and not always enough, apparently, to

provide her with bread. She earned something by running errands; and at an early age was engaged for this purpose by a French milliner in Cockspur Street, at which place some have surmised that she laid the foundations of her knowledge of French and her taste in dress. Then she was engaged as cookmaid in the kitchen where Baddeley, who afterwards became a well-known actor, was chef. Then she sold flowers in the streets, and acquired the nickname of 'Nosegay Fan.' Then she adopted a more profligate and degrading means of support. Arthur Murphy told John Taylor that he remembered having seen her, when she was about twelve years of age, giving recitations at the Bedford and the Shakespeare Taverns under the Piazza in Covent Garden. She used to desire the waiter to inform any private company in the tavern rooms that she would deliver passages from Shakespeare, and other authors, for a small gratuity, and whenever the company consented she stepped upon the table to deliver her recitations. Murphy's next sight of her is related by Taylor as follows:—

'A party of his friends, consisting of four, had agreed to take an excursion to Richmond in Surrey, and to pass the day there. The gentlemen were to meet at the Turk's Head Coffee-house opposite Catherine Street in the Strand. Mr. Murphy and two of the friends whose names I have forgotten, were punctual to the appointment; but they waited for the fourth till their patience was nearly exhausted. At length Mr. Murphy said he knew where to find the fourth gentleman, and would go in pursuit of him. He immediately proceeded to a notorious house under the Piazza in Covent Garden, and there found him. This person was a Mr. Tracy, a gentleman of fortune, well-known at that time under the name of Beau Tracy, on account of the gaiety and splendour of his attire. Finding that Tracy was in the house, Mr. Murphy proceeded at once to his bed-room, where he found the Beau under the hands of his hairdresser, and not half attired. Mr. Murphy waited very patiently till the grand business of the toilet was concluded. While he waited, he thought he saw the

curtains of the bed move, as if there were a person within. Mr. Murphy asked the Beau if he had not a companion. Tracy, a careless rake, answered in the affirmative, and told him to go and have a chat with her, as he would find her a lively wench. Murphy therefore drew one of the curtains aside, and entered into conversation with a fair votaress of Venus, whom he immediately recognised as the girl who had entertained him and his friends some years before at the taverns. She did not seem abashed at being seen by a stranger, but conversed with him with ease, spirit, and humour.'

The next time Murphy saw this young woman she was recognised as a first-rate actress, and more than thirty years afterwards he dedicated to her one of the most successful of his plays, because, he said, she had given to his mere outline a form, a spirit, a countenance, and a mind, and by her talents had made the play her own. It was shortly after this *rencontre* with Murphy that she happily found her way on to the boards. She had somehow formed an acquaintance with Theophilus Cibber, and when that disreputable person opened the Haymarket in 1755, she appeared as Miranda in *The Busybody*, as Miss Jenny in *The Provoked Husband*, as Sylvia in *The Recruiting Officer*, and in other parts, with considerable success. She then got an engagement with Simpson of Bath, where King, the actor, fell in love with her, and roused the jealousy of a Miss Baker who then lived with him. After this she played for a short time in 1756 at Richmond, where Lacy became enamoured of her, and engaged her for Drury Lane at a salary of thirty shillings a week. Her advance was by no means a rapid one, for Mrs. Pritchard and Mrs. Clive were in possession of all the best parts, while Miss Macklin and Miss Pritchard had hereditary claims on the managers for promotion and took precedence of the new-comer. Miss Barton, however, was a diligent student, both in and out of the theatre; and amongst other masters she engaged Mr. Abington, a neat,

gentlemanly-looking little man, who played in the orchestra, to give her lessons in music. According to the *Secret History*, she about this time caught the affections of a young Creole, who, in the course of three or four months, spent £3000 on her, and would have gone on spending had not his father sent for him home. When she saw him off at Portsmouth he presented her with a note for £500, and promised to return to England for the purpose of marrying her; but the very next day she was married to her music-master, Abington. This must have been in 1759, for in that year she is first described in the bills as Mrs. Abington, instead of as Miss Barton. In December of that year, seeing little chance of advancement at Drury Lane, she and her husband suddenly started off for Ireland.

Smock-Alley Theatre, Dublin, was then in difficulties, Brown and his performers being engaged in a struggle with poverty, want of credit, want of numbers, and a deserted and ruinous theatre. Brown entertained a very high opinion of Mrs. Abington's abilities, and had promised her 'every leading character she could wish,' so that she would, at any rate, have a far more favourable field for the display of any ability in Dublin than in London. Tate Wilkinson, who had also been engaged by Brown, and who arrived in Dublin fourteen days after she did, says that she had a good and gracious reception, but not having the London stamp of consequence, people merely said that she was really a very clever woman. She had performed such parts as Dorcas in *The Mock Doctor* at Drury Lane, but Garrick, either not perceiving her merit or for some other reason, had shown no inclination to bring her advantageously before the London public. 'But,' says Tate, 'my then intimate friend, Mrs. Abington, formed a better opinion of her own deserts, and thinking Mr. Garrick intended injury instead of acting kindly, she, without ceremony, suddenly eloped in December

to her former manager and old acquaintance,' Brown. Hitchcock tells us that the theatre opened on Friday, December the 11th, with the *Beaux' Stratagem*, in which Mrs. Abington took the part of Mrs. Sullen. The following Wednesday she appeared as Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*. And each night she appeared she added to her reputation. In Carinna, Clarinda, Flora, Violante, Lady Fanciful, Leanthe, Maria in the *Nonjuror*, and the Fine Lady in *Lethe*, she surpassed all expectations, so that before the season closed she was considered as one of the most promising actresses on the stage. Tate Wilkinson says that her greatest success was in the part of Kitty in the new little farce of *High Life Below Stairs*, which nobody had thought of bringing out till he luckily suggested it. Then—

'The whole circle were in surprise and rapture, each asking the other how such a treasure could have possibly been in Dublin, and in almost a state of obscurity; such a jewel was invaluable, and their own tastes and judgments they feared would justly be called in question if this daughter of Thalia was not immediately taken by the hand and distinguished as her certain and striking merit demanded. . . . *High Life Below Stairs* was perpetually acted, and with never-failing success. In ten days after its being performed *Abington's Cap* was so much the taste with the ladies of fashion and ton that there was not a milliner's window, great or small, but was ornamented with it, and in large letters ABINGTON appeared to attract the passers by.'

Wilkinson left Dublin in March 1760, leaving Mrs. Abington, he says, going on in full career towards the pinnacle on which for so many years afterwards she sat smiling. And although she had many disadvantages to contend against, including the benefits of Barry, Woodward, Mossop, Fitzhenry, and Dancer, which the Dublin people felt bound to attend, she nevertheless upheld the old and sinking house for a time by her single arm against the

many attractions of the new and elegant theatre in Crow Street. Shortly afterwards the fashionable world of Dublin insisted on having Mrs. Abington at the Crow Street house, and she made her first appearance there on the 22nd of May in the character of Lady Townly. In February of the following year she added very greatly to her already high reputation by the easy, elegant, finished portrait of the woman of fashion which she exhibited in the Widow Belmour of Murphy's *The Way to Keep Him*, then performed for the first time in Ireland. And she not only rose thus rapidly in her profession, but she became in Dublin what for so many years she was afterwards in London, the recognised and undisputed leader of taste in feminine apparel. This season of prosperity lasted until the end of 1762, when Mrs. Abington returned to London.

But other things besides professional success occurred during these three years in Ireland. In the rather euphemistic biography of 1888 we are told that—

‘As Mrs. Abington grew popular, her husband showed unmistakeable signs of jealousy, whether justifiable or not it is not easy to say, but things came to such a pitch, and the dissatisfaction grew so mutual that by common consent they parted. A regular agreement was some time after entered into, and she covenanted to pay him a certain sum *per annum* on condition that he neither came near her nor in any way molested her. That he lived some years in receipt of this pension is pretty generally believed, but he soon disappeared from public notice and was speedily forgotten.’

Availing herself of the liberty afforded by this separation, we are further informed, Mrs. Abington appears to have regarded herself as a single woman again, and to have been looked upon in the same light by others, so that she was surrounded by a crowd of admirers, and in order to rid herself of these troublesome gentlemen she formed what she considered an honourable alliance with Mr. Needham,

M.P. for Newry. John Taylor gives the matter a rather different colour. According to his version, while she was in Dublin—

‘She thought it necessary to assume a more precise deportment, and even to affect in public an extraordinary degree of purity. But this mask was so entirely thrown off among some of the Irish noblemen, and other characters well known for wealth and liberality, that as most of them were acquainted with each other, on comparing notes they found that each had been induced by her to think himself the only person distinguished by her partiality.’

When she allied herself with Mr Needham, however, she had no scruples about appearing with him on the most intimate and familiar footing; and her connection with him being as well known as her excellent taste in dress, many of the milliners put bills in their windows announcing that ‘*Abington* caps may be had here for those that *Need ’em*.’ The author of *The Secret History of the Green-Room* states that the rupture with her husband was caused by her connection with Needham. He also informs us that the enamoured M.P.—

‘enjoyed a singular satisfaction in reading, explaining, and communicating every kind of cultivation to a mind he found so happily disposed to receive and profit by his instructions; and from this time Mrs. Abington became attached to polite pursuits, in which by her perseverance she is now [*i.e.* in 1795] so accomplished.’

It was in consequence of Needham being called to England on business, towards the end of 1762, that she then severed her connection with the Dublin theatre, in order that she might accompany him. He was in a bad state of health; and she attended him to Bath, and other invalid resorts, until he died. ‘On the approach of death,’ says the author of *The Secret History*, ‘he bethought himself of leaving out of the reach of adversity a faithful friend and companion who had devoted herself to him,’ and ‘his heirs discharged

in a very honourable manner the provision he had made for her.'

As soon as she had recovered from the loss of her lover, she devoted herself again with great assiduity to the exercise of her profession. Garrick welcomed her warmly to Drury Lane; and although Mrs. Pritchard and Mrs. Clive then monopolised almost all the best characters, she was able to make a favourable impression in the Widow Belmour, in Araminta in *The School for Lovers*, in Belinda in *All in the Wrong*, and in other parts. Her first appearance, after an absence of five years, was on November the 27th, 1765, and she remained at Drury Lane for the following fifteen years. Davies, in his *Life of Garrick*, written in 1780, when Mrs. Abington was in the zenith of her fame, is very enthusiastic in his description of her many surpassing merits. The part of Charlotte in *The Hypocrite*, he says, had been most excellently performed by Mrs. Oldfield, and at a later date by Mrs. Woffington and Mrs. Pritchard, but it was impossible to conceive that more gaiety, ease, humour, and grace than Mrs. Abington exhibited in this part could possibly have been assumed even by those great actresses; and her ideas of it were entirely her own, for she had seen no pattern. He then gives the following more detailed description of her:—

'Her person is formed with great elegance, her address is graceful, her look animated and expressive. To the goodness of her understanding, and the superiority of her taste, she is indebted principally for her power of pleasing; the tones of her voice are not naturally charming to the ear, but her incomparable skill in modulation renders them perfectly agreeable; her articulation is so exact that every syllable she utters is conveyed distinctly, and even harmoniously. Congreve's Millamant of past times she has skilfully modelled and adapted to the admired coquette and the lovely tyrant of the present day. All ages have their particular colours and variations of follies and fashions; these she under-

stands perfectly, and dresses them to the taste of the present hour.

What chiefly delighted the public in Mrs. Abington's acting was the easy manner, as of one accustomed to the company of distinguished persons of high rank and graceful behaviour, with which she represented the fine lady of fashion. But though she was most admired, and doubtless most admirable, in parts such as those of Lady Townly, Lady Betty Modish, Millamant, or Beatrice, yet, as Davies declares :—

‘So various and unlimited are her talents that she is not confined to females of a superior class ; she can condescend occasionally to the country girl, the romp, the hoyden, and the chambermaid, and put on the various humours, airs, and whimsical peculiarities of these under-parts ; she thinks nothing low that is in nature ; nothing mean or beneath her skill which is characteristical.’

Davies also assures us that ‘the decency of her behaviour in private life has attracted the notice and gained her the esteem of many persons of quality of her own sex’ ; but, though this may have been true enough when Davies wrote, it scarcely fits the circumstances of the earlier years of her celebrity in London, any more than it does those of her previous life in Ireland. Davies seems to have thought, also, that Mrs. Abington's many places of abode were to be accounted for by her prudence in adapting her style of living to her means for the time being, so that when in the full swing of her popularity a fine house in Piccadilly, opposite the Green Park, was not an unjustifiable extravagance, seeing that, at other times, when not so rich in purse, she was content with far humbler dwellings. The author of *The Secret History*, however, states that the various houses were used contemporaneously ; and gives a widely different version of the matter. After her arrival at the pinnacle of fame, he informs us, being somewhat conversant in amours :—

‘She now resolved to separate her lovers into two different classes: the first, those whose liberality might enable her to live in splendour; and the second, those whom her humour pitched upon. For this purpose she had various houses in town for her various admirers; her assignations with Mr. Jefferson, formerly of Drury Lane, were made at a house near Tottenham Court Road, while my Lord Shelburne, now Marquis of Lansdown, allowed her £50 per week, gave her an elegant house at the corner of Clarges Street, Piccadilly, and continued this generosity till he married. Mr. Dundas succeeded his Lordship as her humble servant.’

It must be admitted that a fine house in Piccadilly, with a carriage and footmen (to say nothing of other contemporaneous residences), would have been difficult to keep up on Mrs. Abington’s salary of £12 per (acting) week, £60 for clothes, and a benefit. And although she had an annuity (the amount of which is not stated) from the late Mr. Needham, it must not be forgotten that she had all the time to find means for the separate maintenance of that dapper little gentleman, Mr. Abington. There is no doubt that she persistently tried to push her way upward in the social strata. When she was in Paris in 1771 we find her endeavouring to scrape acquaintance with Horace Walpole. But that very astute dilettante, fond as he was of the society of actresses, was not at that time to be caught, and in a very polite and stately manner put her off.

‘If I had known, Madam, of your being in Paris [he writes], before I heard it from Colonel Blaquiere, I should certainly have prevented your flattering invitation, and have offered you any services that could depend on my acquaintance here. It is plain I am old, and live with very old folks, when I did not hear of your arrival. However, Madam, I have not that fault at least for a Veteran, the thinking nothing equal to what they admired in their youth. I do impartial justice to your merit, and fairly allow it not only equal to that of any actress I have ever seen, but believe the present age will not be in the wrong if they hereafter prefer it to those they may live to see. Your allowing me to wait on you in London, Madam, will make me some amends for the loss I have

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here; and I shall take an early opportunity of assuring you how much I am, Madam, your most obliged humble servant.

‘HOR. WALPOLE.’

But it was eight years before Walpole’s ‘early opportunity’ arrived.

Garrick had a good deal of trouble with several of his actresses, but no performer tried his temper as Mrs. Abington did, especially after Mrs. Clive’s retirement in 1769, when the Abington knew as well as anybody that in the comedy line she was without a serious rival. Garrick once went the length of saying: ‘She is below the thought of any honest man or woman; she is as silly as she is false and treacherous’; and perhaps it would not have been surprising if he had said even worse things, in the state of distraction to which her perversity sometimes drove him. In May 1774, when an agreement was made with her for three years, on the terms already mentioned, namely, £12 a week, a benefit, and £60 for clothes, a memorandum was drawn up to show how many times she had played during the previous season. Tragedy fairly divided the time with comedy in those days; and it appeared that while Mrs. Abington had only once been called upon to play more than three times in any one week, her total appearances from October 7 to February 19 had only been forty-two, or rather less, on an average, than twice a week. Yet she was continually talking of her ‘great fatigue’ and ‘hard labour.’ The kind of thing which naturally roused Garrick’s ire was the receipt of a note of the following type, just before the time for the performance of a play in which she was advertised to appear:—

‘Mrs. Abington sends the part of Letitia in *The Cholerick Man* to Mr. Hopkins in order to his receiving Mr. Garrick’s commands as to the person he is pleased to give it in study to for the next representation of the play. Mr. Cumberland has obligingly given his consent to her resigning of the part, and Mrs. Abington flatters

herself that Mr. Garrick will have the goodness and complaisance to relieve her from a character so little suited to her very confined style of acting. Mrs. Abington has been very ill for some days past, but would not importune Mr. Garrick with complaints, as she saw there was a necessity for her exerting herself till the *new tragedy* was ready.'

Boaden, who edited the Garrick correspondence, remarks on this, that those who had witnessed Mr. Cumberland's irritation, and his acquiescence under such provocations, would have a just notion how 'obligingly' he had 'consented' to resign the best actress in the theatre on the getting up of a new comedy! During the years 1774, 1775, and 1776 Garrick appears to have had great difficulty in getting her to do anything but write angry and sarcastic letters. One Wednesday morning in 1774, for example, he received the following epistle:—

'Indeed, Sir, I could not play *Violante* to-morrow if my happiness in the next world depended upon it; but if you order me, I will look it over, and be perfect as soon as possible. . . . I am sure if you are pleased to give yourself a moment's time to reflect upon my general conduct in the theatre, you will see that I ever made my attention to my business and my duty to you my sole object and ambition.'

From Garrick's letters to her, we infer that his reflections enabled him to see nothing of the kind. On September 26, 1774, he addressed her to the following effect:—

'DEAR MADAM,—As no business can be done without being explicit, I must desire to know if you choose to perform *Mrs. Sullen*. The part is reserved for you, and the play must be acted soon: whoever does it with *Mr. Smith* must do it with me—supposing that I am ever able to be the rake again. We talked a great deal last night, and I am sorry to say it, without my having the least idea what to do in consequence of it. . . . I cannot create better actors than we have, and we must both do our best with them. Could I put you upon the highest comic pinnacle, I certainly would do it; but indeed, my dear Madam, we shall not mount much if

your cold counteracting discourse is to pull us back at every step. Don't imagine that the gout makes me peevish; I am talking to you in the greatest good-humour, but if we don't do our best with the best we have, it is all fruitless murmuring and inactive repining.'

An endorsement characterises the copy of this as—'A letter to Mrs. Abington, in which her manner of doing and saying is not described amiss.' In the following year matters seem to have got worse instead of better. On the 6th of March she writes:—

'Mr. Garrick behaves with so much unprovoked incivility to Mrs. Abington that she is at a loss how to account for it; and her health and spirits are so much hurt by it that she is not able to say *what* or when she can play. If he had been pleased to give her a day's notice, she could have played her part in the *West Indian*; but it was not possible for her, at three o'clock, to read her part, get her clothes ready, and find a dresser, all by six o'clock, and that too at a time when she is in a very weak and ill state of health. If Mr. Garrick really thinks Mrs. Abington so bad a subject as he is pleased to describe her in all the companies he goes into, she thinks his remedy is very easy, and is willing on her part to release him from so great an inconvenience as soon as he pleases; and only begs, while he is pleased to continue her in his theatre, that he will not treat her with so much harshness as he has hitherto done.'

To this Garrick replied on the following morning:—

'MADAM,—Whether [it be] a consciousness of your unaccountable and unwarrantable behaviour to me, or that you have really heard of *my description of you* in all companies, I will not inquire; whatever I have said I will justify, for I always speak the truth. Is it possible for me to describe you as your note of yesterday describes yourself? You want a day's notice to perform a character you played originally, and which you have appeared in several times this season: you knew our distress yesterday almost as soon as I did, and did not plead the want of a day's notice, clothes, hairdresser, etc., but you refused on account of your health, though you were in spirits and rehearsing a new farce. You suffered us to be obliged to another lady, of another house, to do your business, when neither

our distresses, the credit of the theatre, or your own duty and justice, could have the least influence upon you. How could I give you a day's notice when I knew not of Mr. Reddish's illness but in the morning? and you were the first person I sent to, between *twelve and one*, and not at three o'clock. It was happy for us that we found a lady, though not of our company, who had feeling for our distress, and relieved us from it without requiring a day's notice, or wanting anything but an opportunity to show her politeness. These are serious truths, Madam, and are not to be described like the lesser peccadillos of a fine lady. A little time will show that Mr. Garrick has done essential offices of kindness to Mrs. Abington, when his humanity only, and not his duty, obliged him. As to your wishes of delivering me from the inconvenience of your engagement, that, I hope, will soon be another's concern: my greatest comfort is that I shall soon be delivered from the capriciousness, inconsistency, injustice, and unkindness of those to whom I always intended the greatest good in my power.'

He adds that her refusal to play that evening has obliged him, though but just recovered from a dreadful disorder, to risk a relapse. But Mrs. Abington was not the sort of person to remain silent under a rebuke of this kind; and within a few hours Garrick received the following reply:—

'SIR,—From your not recollecting some circumstances, your letter is a misrepresentation of facts from the beginning to the end. You are pleased to say the *West Indian* has been performed several times this season; it has really been acted but once, and that at the very beginning of the winter. You say I was well and in spirits at the rehearsal. Indeed, Sir, whoever told you so deceived you. I was ill, and not able to hold myself up in my chair. You say I knew the distress of the theatre at twelve o'clock. I saw very little distress, for it was plain that *The Country Girl* could have been acted from the instant that Mr. Reddish's illness was known; the design therefore of changing it to the *West Indian* could only be to hurt and hurry me; and if I refused, it was a good pretence for borrowing a performer to play my part, in order to give colour to the abuse that was intended for me in the papers this morning. I have, however, been too attentive to my business,

and too faithful a servant, both to you, Sir, and to the public, to suffer from such malice and ill-nature ; and if you refuse me the indulgence that is due to me for all the labour and attention I have given to the theatre, for this winter in particular, and for many years past, I must at least remember what is due to myself ; and if the newspapers are to be made the vehicles of your resentment to me, I must justify myself in the best manner I can.'

Garrick had the pen of a ready writer ; and he must have sat down instantly to compose the following rejoinder, for it is dated the same evening :—

'MADAM,—I beg that you will indulge yourself in writing what you please and when you please. If you imagine that I in the least countenance, or am accessory to, any scribbling in the papers, you are deceived. I detest all such methods of showing my resentment. I never heard of the disorder which was occasioned in *The Maid of the Oaks*: I was too ill to be troubled with it: and Mr. King, whom you have always unjustly suspected, never mentioned it to me, nor did I know of the paragraph you allude to till it was shown to me this morning. Could *The Country Girl* have been done with credit yesterday, I should not have distressed myself to have applied to you, or to have borrowed a lady from another theatre. As I will always retract the most insignificant mistake I may have made, I find by the prompter that the *West Indian* has been performed but once. May I venture, if *Braganza* cannot be performed on Thursday, to put your name in the bills for Lady Bab in *The Maid of the Oaks*, or for any other part? I most sincerely assure you that I do not ask you this to distress you, but to carry on the business in the best manner I am able.—I am, Madam, your most humble Servant,

'D. GARRICK.'

'Mrs. Yates has not sent word that she cannot play on Thursday, and I hope you may be excused. I ask the question to prevent trouble to both. The writing peevish letters will do no business.'

If Garrick had had several Mrs. Abingtons in his company, he would not only have needed a numerous staff of secretaries, but also Napoleon's power of dictating to half a dozen or so of them simultaneously. The correspondence

goes on, in a somewhat similar strain, throughout the year. One day she writes :—

‘SIR,—A paragraph to say that *The Sultan* is withdrawn would be a very singular and a very new object ; however, as that threat is only meant in harshness and insult to me, it is neither new nor singular ; and all the answer I should make to such a paragraph would be that I had withdrawn myself from the theatre, which I should most undoubtedly have done some years since, but that Mr. Garrick has so much real goodness in his nature that no ill effects need ever be dreaded where he has the entire government. I will endeavour, and I think it is possible, to be ready by Tuesday, as I see *The Sultan* is advertised for that day ; but I shall want many little helps, particularly in the business of the dinner scene, and about my song, as I am at best a bad stick in that line, as well as in most others, God knows.’

On another occasion, when she had apparently been absent, and Hopkins had been instructed to inquire why, she complains as follows :—

‘Mrs. Abington has kept her room with a fever for some days past or she would have complained to Mr. Garrick of a letter she has received from Mr. Hopkins, dictated in a spirit of insincerity and misrepresentation. He says it is written by order of Mr. Garrick, which Mrs. Abington is the more surprised at, as she is not conscious that her conduct in the theatre has deserved so much acrimony and ill-humour. She apprehends for some time past she has had enemies about Mr. Garrick, and it is to them she supposes herself indebted for the very great change in Mr. Garrick’s behaviour, after all the fatigue she has undergone, and the disappointments she has experienced in respect to the business that was by agreement to be done for her this winter.’

Sometimes she objects to a part which has been allotted to her ; as in the following note, which is dated merely ‘Tuesday, 3 o’clock,’ but which, as likely as not, refers to a performance to take place the same day :—

‘Mrs. Abington presents her compliments to Mr. Garrick and is sorry to read of his indisposition ; she is very ill herself, and exceedingly hurt that he should accuse her of *want of zeal for the*

cause, as she flatters herself that Mr. Garrick is fully persuaded she has never been wanting in duty and attachment to the business of his theatre. But she thinks she is entitled to the same degree of indulgence that is given to other performers, and hoped that Mr. Garrick would have had the goodness to let her come out in some part of stronger comic humour than that of Millamant. She begs that he will not be angry, or treat her with harshness, as he will certainly find her a very faithful and useful subject, if he will condescend to think her worth a very little degree of attention and consideration.'

On the 27th of May she writes to Garrick telling him she is very much indisposed, and cannot act the following night; but from the tenor of the letter we may shrewdly suspect that indisposition did not in this case spell illness, for she says:—

'If the consideration of the salary I receive is a reason for my being called out to play to empty benches, I must beg leave to decline receiving any more pay at your office; at the same time I take the liberty of assuring you that I shall be ready and willing to stay in town for the purpose of acting with you, if you think proper to call for my services, and in such case shall accept of any portion of my salary that you may think I deserve for such attendance.'

In July she wrote him a letter, which Garrick endorsed—'Mrs. Abington about Pope's parts,' and in which she says:—

'The *parts* to which the actresses of *my time* have owed their fame are in the possession of other performers . . . and of those others in which I have been most favourably received by the public, the plays are so altered by the death of actors, the giving up their parts, or other accidents, that they are no longer of use in the catalogue.'

Garrick's answer to this has not been preserved; but to a request which she made in the following November to have the part allotted to Mrs. Barry in a new comedy by Murphy, the irritated manager replied in the following terms:—

'MADAM,—I am always happy to see all the performers of

merit who belong to us, happy and satisfied ; but if I were to make myself uneasy when they are pleased, right or wrong, to be discontented, I cannot pay them the compliment to mortify myself for nothing. After I have said this, let me be permitted to say further, that I never yet saw *Mrs Abington* theatrically happy for a week together ; there is such a continual working of a fancied interest, such a refinement of importance, and such imaginary good and evil, continually arising in the politician's mind, that the only best substantial security for public applause is neglected for these shadows. That I may hear no more of *this* or *that* part in Mr. Murphy's play, I now again tell you that every author, since my management, distributed his parts as he thinks will be of most service to his interest, nor have I ever interfered, or will interfere, unless I perceive that they would propose something contrary to common-sense. As I cannot think this to be the case between Mrs. Barry and you, I must beg leave to decline entering into the matter. I sincerely wish, for all your sakes, that you may have a character worthy of you, as well as Mrs. Barry. . . . I am very willing to do you all the justice in my power, and I could wish you would represent me so to persons *out* of the theatre, and, indeed, for your own sake, for I always hear this tittle-tattle again, and have it always in my power to prove that I am never influenced by any little considerations to be unjust to Mrs. Abington or any other performer.'

It was her benefit in March of this year which Johnson attended, when he surprised Boswell by his patience in sitting through a play of five acts and a farce of two, although, in consequence of forming one of a body of forty wits who accompanied Sir Joshua Reynolds and were seated in the front boxes, he could neither see nor hear at such a distance from the stage. He had met Mrs. Abington a short time previously at the house of some ladies he was visiting, and she had begged him to attend this benefit. 'I told her I could not hear,' said Johnson, 'but she insisted so much on my coming that it would have been brutal to have refused her.' Boswell reports that a few days afterwards he supped with Johnson and some friends at a

tavern, when one of the company (most probably the indiscreet Boswell himself) was rather too forward in rallying the Doctor on the subject, and had reason to repent of his temerity. 'Why, Sir, did you go to Mrs. Abington's benefit?' queried the small wit. 'Did you see?'—JOHNSON. 'No, Sir.'—'Did you hear?'—JOHNSON. 'No, Sir.'—'Why then, Sir, did you go?'—JOHNSON. 'Because, Sir, she is a favourite of the publick: and when the publick cares the thousandth part for you that it does for her, I will go to your benefit too.' Mrs. Abington was now not only the favourite of the playgoers, but was also becoming a favourite in polite society. One day in 1775, when dining at Thrale's, Johnson mentioned having supped the evening before at Mrs. Abington's with a number of fashionable people, and seemed much pleased with having made one in so elegant a circle. Baretti notes that Johnson certainly ought to have been pleased, because Mrs. Abington 'took pains to distinguish him above all her guests, who were all people of the first distinction.' Johnson remarked on the following day that Sir C. Thompson, and others who were there, spoke like people who had seen good company, adding, 'and so did Mrs. Abington herself, who could not have seen good company.'

Her disputes with Garrick continued to the day of her retirement in 1776. One day she writes to say the servant has brought her word that Mr. Garrick is very angry at her not attending rehearsal that morning; a message which she takes the liberty of disbelieving, for she feels sure that Mr. Garrick could not expect her to go out that morning after the labour she has so willingly gone through for three nights past. Moreover, she is 'ill to death, and really not able to stand.' A little later, on a Sunday morning, she writes to inform Mr. Garrick that she is very ill, and has been so for some days; but the real reason for her letter seems to be

an indisposition to act unless the play of itself happens to be new and attractive enough to bring a full house; for—

‘She is greatly surprised to see *The Hypocrite* advertised for Wednesday, and begs it may not be continued with her name in it, as she certainly cannot play in it on Wednesday. Even if she were well enough to perform so long a part, Mr. Garrick knows the play will not bring half a house, and she does not see why she should be obliged to play to empty benches.’

She is willing to act in any plays that are ready, she says; but if the plays (by which she seems to mean new comedies) are not ready, she begs that Mr. Garrick will not make *The Morning Post* the vehicle for his resentment; and she repeats her frequent request that he will give up her agreement. On the first of March this year, the managers felt themselves obliged to take counsel’s opinion on the dispute that arose about her benefit. Benefits, it appears, were generally fixed according to the rank of the performers, that rank being determined by their rate of salary. At this time Mrs. Abington stood in the fourth rank, and next below her came Miss Yonge. Mrs. Abington had the choice of Saturday the 16th of March or Monday the 18th. She had objections to both days. Saturday was Opera-night, and Monday would degrade her by giving precedence to Miss Yonge. After some delay, she settled on the Saturday; and the following Monday was accordingly given to Miss Yonge. Next day, however, she wanted the Monday, and when she was informed that this was not now available, having been apportioned to the other performer, she declined to advertise herself for the Saturday, and gave out that the managers had refused her any night for her benefit. Counsel’s opinion was that the managers should make a certain definite offer to Mrs. Abington, her refusal of which would place her unequivocally in the wrong box, and enable them, in case she declined to avail herself of it,

to give any other performance on the night offered to her. Her final letter on this matter, dated March 4, was to the following effect:—

‘SIR,—As it has been for some time my fixed determination to quit the stage at the conclusion of the present season and not return to it again, I thankfully accept your very obliging intention to play for my benefit in May; you will therefore please to dispose of Saturday the 16th inst. in any manner most agreeable to yourself.’

A transcript of this was endorsed by Garrick—‘A copy of Mother Abington’s letter about leaving the stage,’ and he added: ‘The above is a true copy of the letter, examined word by word, of that worst of bad women, Mrs. Abington, to ask my playing for her benefit, and why?’ He also wrote to her, a few days afterwards, cautioning her not to be rash, and pointing out that there were many reasons, altogether too strong to be withstood, for his quitting the stage, but in her case there were none that could not be easily overcome. A report of her impending retirement got abroad; and a few weeks after her benefit one of the papers announced that she had taken a hotel in Paris, and fitted it up in a luxurious style, for the reception of the travelling English nobility. Then it was announced, on equally good authority, that the French project had been abandoned, and that she had determined to spend the remainder of her life in Wales. But on the opening of the theatres for the season of 1776-7 nobody was surprised to find that she appeared as usual at Drury Lane. The newspapers abounded in paragraphs about her of one kind or another, especially of the kind most acceptable to the feminine half of the public, who were doubtless greatly interested to learn that—

‘Mrs. Abington is the harbinger of the reigning fashion for the season—a very beautiful style of petticoat, of Persian origin, is among the last importations of this admired actress.’

Or—

‘Mrs. Abington, having long been considered in the *beau monde* as a leading example in dress, her gown on Saturday night was of white lutestring made close to her shape, sleeves to the wrist, and a long train; her hair was dressed very far back on the sides, with curls below and not high above, nor did she wear one of those tremendous hair-frizzed peaks which of late have disguised the ladies—so probably they will no more appear as unicorns with a horn issuing from their foreheads.’

Charles Dibdin, writing in the later days of the following reign, when English men and women attired themselves more ridiculously than ever before or since, looked back with regret to the days when Mrs. Abington set the fashions. He tells us that—

‘She was consulted by ladies of the first distinction, not from caprice, as we have frequently seen in other instances, but from a decided conviction of her judgment in blending what was beautiful with what was becoming. Indeed, dress took a sort of ton from her fancy, and ladies, both on the stage and off, piqued themselves on decorating their persons with decency and decorum.’

He also alleges, what will not perhaps be so readily credited, namely, that she had a corresponding influence on society manners likewise, and that to the natural, winning, and sprightly manners of her predecessors in the representation of the higher parts in comedy, she added a degree of grace, fashion, and accomplishment *which was no sooner seen than it was imitated in the politest circles.*

In 1779, on the production of Sheridan’s *School for Scandal*, Mrs. Abington was the original Lady Teazle; and notwithstanding that she was almost the age of the performer who played Sir Peter, it was one of her greatest successes. When Horace Walpole saw the play he was astonished to find more parts performed admirably in it than in almost any play he ever saw; and Mrs. Abington, he says, was ‘equal to the first of her profession.’ Her Lady

Teazle was one of the few parts he had seen which affected him so powerfully that the performer seemed the real person. But he was not one of those who thought her supremely excellent in the higher character of genteel comedy, holding that she could never go beyond Lady Teazle, and was limited to that rank of women, who are always aping women of fashion without arriving at the style. In 1779 he at length made her personal acquaintance; for in May of that year we find him concluding a letter to Conway with the information—‘I am going to sup with Mrs. Abington, and hope Mrs. Clive will not hear of it.’ Mrs. Clive had retired from the stage ten years previously, but it appears from this that her jealousy of the rival star might still be productive of a lively ebullition of temper. In the summer of 1780 she seems to have been desirous of taking some of her friends over Walpole’s toy-Gothic castle at Strawberry Hill, for he writes to her:—

‘You may certainly always command me and my house. My common custom is to give a ticket for only four persons at a time; but it would be very insolent in me, when all laws are set at nought, to pretend to prescribe rules. At such times there is a shadow of authority in setting the laws aside by the legislature itself; and though I have no army to supply their place, I declare Mrs. Abington may march through all my dominions at the head of as large a troupe as she pleases—I do not say, as she can muster and command; for then I am sure my house would not hold them.’

She was now at the acme of her fame; but increasing consequence evidently made her increasingly difficult to deal with; and early in 1782 she withdrew from Drury Lane because she could not obtain an increase of emoluments amounting to about £1000 during the season. Negotiations went on for some time with Covent Garden; but, admirable as she was, says Boaden, ‘neither manager considered her attraction at this time at all equivalent to the engagement

she demanded.' However, a bargain was at length struck, and on the 29th of November, when she was about forty-five years of age, she made her first appearance at Covent Garden. Between the first and second acts of the play (*The Discovery*) she came on and spoke an address, probably of her own composition, in which she said :—

' Oft have I come, ambassadress in state,
From some poor author trembling from his fate—
Oft has a generous public heard my prayer,
And shook with vast applause the troubled air—
Then why should I—a creature of your own—
Born of your smiles, and murder'd by your frown,
On this occasion fear your hearts can harden,
Tho' a novice now at Covent Garden.

Or here, or there, my business still's the same,
Folly and affectation are my game.
Whether the Hoyden, rough from Congreve's lays,
Unknowing in French manners or French phrase,
Who, conscious of no crime in speaking plain,
Will bawl out *Smock* for *Chemise de la Reine*.
Or modish Prude, who visions through her fan,
Who censures, shuns, yet loves that monster—man.
Or yet the brisk Coquette, whose spreading sail
Courts every wind that can bring in a male.
In short, good folks, tho' I have changed my school,
Alike you'll find me here to play the fool.'

Boaden says that her appearance at Covent Garden produced a great sensation ; and as she was the peculiar delight of the fashionable world, who had not only admired her ' brilliant loquacity ' on the stage, but had also long permitted her almost to legislate for them in matters of dress, he records for the benefit of his female readers that when she hurried on to the stage to deliver the foregoing address she was attired in what their mothers deemed a simple and characteristic costume, namely, a train and petticoat of white and silver stuff, a bodice and sash of dark Carmelite satin, and short white sleeves. She remained at Covent Garden for

the following seven or eight years; leaving Drury Lane to rely mainly on the unparalleled attraction of the tragic Siddons, and to bring forward Miss Farren as her own rival in all the first-rate comedy parts. Boaden, who, whatever may be his demerits as a biographer, is usually excellent and discriminating in his characterisation of the various performers of his time, tells us that Mrs. Abington possessed 'very peculiar and hitherto unapproached talent'; and that, in his opinion, Miss Farren never approached her in comedy any nearer than Mrs. Esten approached Mrs. Siddons in tragedy.

'She, I think, took more entire *possession* of the stage than any actress I have seen; there was, however, no assumption in her dignity; she was a lawful and graceful sovereign, who exerted her full power and enjoyed her established prerogatives. The ladies of her day wore the hoop and its concomitant train. The *spectator's* exercise of the fan was really no play of *fancy*. Shall I say that I have never seen it in a hand so dexterous as that of Mrs. Abington? She was a woman of great application; to speak as she did required more *thought* than usually attends female study. Far the greater part of the sex rely upon an intuition which seldom misleads them; such discernment as it gives becomes habitual, and is commonly sufficient, or sufficient for common purposes. But commonplace was not the station of Abington. She was always beyond the surface; untwisted all the chains which bind ideas together, and seized upon the exact cadence and emphasis by which the point of the dialogue is enforced. Her voice was of a high pitch, and not very powerful. Her management of it alone made it an organ; yet this was so perfect that we sometimes converted the mere effect into a cause, and supposed it was the sharpness of the tone that had conveyed the sting. Yet, her figure considered, her voice rather sounded inadequate; its articulation, however, gave both strength and smartness to it, though it could not give sweetness. You heard her well and without difficulty; and it is the first duty of a public speaker to be intelligible. Her deportment is not so easily described; more womanly than Farren—fuller, yet not heavy, like Yonge, and far beyond even the conception of modern fine ladies.'

How the Covent Garden managers got on with her for seven or eight years is not on record. But in 1790 she quietly retired from the theatre, without the benefit and formal leave-taking which was then the usual custom. The author of *The Secret History of the Green Room* asserts that during the later years of her acting not only the complexion but the form which she indulged the town with a sight of was an artificial concoction, and that she stipulated with the company that while playing she was not to be touched. He says that Henderson once, when playing Benedick to her Beatrice, disregarded this warning, and happening to press warmly upon her, heard a loud crack. 'For Heaven's sake, madam, what's the matter?' asked the apparently astonished actor. 'Oh, you rude man,' replied she, 'look what you have done!' 'Never mind, madam, it is only a flaw in the porcelain,' was the rejoinder; 'we will slip into a china shop and have it repaired.' John Bernard's account of her appearance only a few days before she quitted the stage, however, conveys a very different impression. There had been a gallant controversy about her at the Beef-Steak Club. One of the members, while admitting her to possess still all the merit an actress could, found a great defect in her having false teeth, though he was ready to admit that everything else was entirely her own. Some of her admirers present contended for the genuineness even of her 'ivories'; a wager was laid, and the decision was referred to Bernard. He admits that he was sceptical, and thought that as she was on the borders of sixty, 'it was not so much to be complained of if, in this respect as well as in others, she agreeably deceived the public.' But he had some trouble at arriving at any assurance on the point.

'For the first and second evening, though I repeatedly engaged her in conversation, my experiments failed. With her very

brilliant eyes, it was impossible that I could keep mine always fixed on her mouth; yet when I sat by her, and others attracted her attention, my minutest observation left me in a state of conscientious indecision. The third evening I played "Dupely" to her "Lady Bab" in General Burgoyne's comedy of *The Maid of the Oaks*. Having neglected the rehearsal, she requested me to run over the words with her in the green-room. Leading her to a sofa for the purpose, I made use of some premeditated witticism, either on the play or the part, which induced Mrs. Abington to laugh heartily, and then—(as Sterne says)—and then, looking her full in the face or rather in the mouth, I was positively assured that her teeth were her own.'

Another observer (who may perhaps be pardoned the slight inaccuracy in his figures for the sake of his epigram) said that 'she had been on the stage thirty years; she was one-and-twenty when she came, and one-and-twenty when she went.' In June 1797 she offered to speak an epilogue on the occasion of a free night which was given at Covent Garden for the relief of the widows and orphans of those who had fallen in the victory over the Spanish fleet at St. Vincent, and as this brought her again in touch with the managers, she was persuaded to return to the stage for a short period. But she soon had enough of it, and her last public appearance was made on the 12th of April 1799. When she was asked, in 1801, to play for the daughter of a gentleman who was thought to have been of some service to her in the press, she politely but emphatically declined, saying:—

'I assure you that if it were given me to choose whether I would go upon the stage or beg charity from my friends for my daily bread, I would embrace the latter condition, and think myself a gainer in credit by the preference.'

After her retirement, says John Taylor, she lived in Pall Mall, and must therefore have been 'in easy circumstances.' He says it was well known that she had an income from a deceased nobleman, once eminent in the political world

which terminated at his death, and was annulled by his immediate successor; but when the latter died shortly afterwards, the new peer generously restored the annuity 'from a regard to the memory of his father.' She had many friends, and was much sought after in society; but with certain old ladies of fashion 'she was tempted to play high at cards, and as they were as skilful in acting the parts of gamesters as she was in any of the characters which she represented on the stage, she is said to have suffered severely by their superior dexterity.' Crabb Robinson met her in June 1811, and finding her then to be no beauty, concluded that she never had been a beauty, and duly made an entry accordingly in his entertaining diary:—

'Dined at Serjeant Rough's, and met the once celebrated Mrs. Abington. She bears the marks of having been always plain. She herself laughed at her snub nose. But she is erect, has a large blue expressive eye, and an agreeable voice. She spoke of her retirement from the stage as occasioned by the vexations of a theatrical life. She said she should have gone mad if she had not quitted her profession. She has lost all her professional feelings, and when she goes to the theatre can laugh and cry like a child; but the trouble is too great, and she does not often go.'

Crabb Robinson would not have supposed, either from her manner or the substance of her conversation, that she had been on the stage, and found her to speak with the ease of a person used to good society, rather than with the assurance of one whose business it had been to imitate that ease. John Taylor met her, near about the same date, at Mrs. Conway's in Stratford Place, where she was treated with much respect by the company. And one evening shortly afterwards he dined with her at the house of Mrs. Jordan in Cadogan Place, when, he says, she displayed great spirit, and enlivened the company with many interesting

anecdotes of theatrical history as well as of fashionable life. But her chief talk was of Garrick, of whom she seemed never to tire; and she wound up a glowing eulogy by observing that 'if she might presume to give an opinion, she would say Shakespeare was made for Garrick and Garrick for Shakespeare.' The latest glimpse that we get of her is also from the pen of John Taylor. He had called at the house of his old friend Nealson (stockbroker to Coutts and other bankers) who was also an old friend of Mrs. Abington's. Nealson was alarmingly ill, too ill to receive visitors; and as Taylor was departing after having made his inquiries, he met Mrs. Abington in the passage, coming in for the same purpose. Two peculiarities puzzled him much. In the first place, he says, nobody who had only seen her in her better days would have recognised the former 'glass of fashion' in the old woman with a common red cloak, and not only the attire but the demeanour of the wife of an inferior tradesman. In the second place—

'She seemed to be under the influence of extraordinary prudery, her reign of gallantry having long passed by, and declined telling her name to the servant, but desired the master might be merely told that "the gentlewoman" had called to inquire after his health. As I knew the high regard that Nealson had for her, I pressed her to leave her name, as I was sure that such an attention on her part would soothe his sufferings and perhaps promote his recovery. She was inflexible, and watched me lest I should disclose her name.'

Taylor, however, did manage to find an excuse to slip back and whisper that the lady was Mrs. Abington, when the servant quietly replied—'I know it, sir.' He then parted with Mrs. Abington at the door, and never saw her again. She died on the 4th of March 1815, and it is noted as a rather singular circumstance that none of the theatrical fraternity attended her funeral.



Sophia Biddleley.

FROM THE ENGRAVING BY WELSH OF THE PORTRAIT BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

SOPHIA BADDELEY

MRS. BADDELEY, though not comparable in ability with several of her contemporaries, was not without talent as an actress; and when she first appeared in the part of Ophelia, Garrick (whose judgment in his own art, as Boaden observes, cannot be questioned) pronounced her delightful. But it was to the extraordinary beauty of her face that she owed her celebrity—and her ruin. Some notion of the fascination she exercised may be obtained from a story which Bernard, the Secretary of the Beef-Steak Club, tells in his *Retrospections*. Dr. Herschel (before he became Sir William, and a great astronomer) was organist of the Octagon at Bath; and he happened to be playing a violin in the theatre orchestra there when Mrs. Baddeley came down to give a few nights' performances. He had never seen her; and when she first walked on to the stage as 'Polly,' he was so overpowered by the sudden vision of such beauty that he dropped his fiddlestick and stared at her in amazement! The popular appreciation of that beauty may be gathered from another story. When Foote produced his comedy of *The Maid of Bath* at the Haymarket in 1771, he induced Mrs. Baddeley to occupy a prominent position in one of the stage boxes. In the course of the play, when, in the character of 'Flint,' he had to descant on the charms of the heroine of the piece, he advanced to the foot-lights and exclaimed—'Not even the beauty of the nine Muses, not even the divine Baddeley herself, who' (pointing to the box) 'is sitting there, could exceed that of the Maid of Bath!' A round of applause

greeted this peculiar personal effusion; and when Mrs. Baddeley, blushing and showing evident signs of confusion, rose from her seat and curtsied to the gazing crowd, the plaudits from every part of the house, we are told, lasted for nearly a quarter of an hour. Unhappily, Mrs. Baddeley was scarcely more distinguished for the beauty of her face than she was for the imprudence, to use no harsher word, of her private conduct; and the biography of her which appeared in 1787 is by no means pleasant reading.

The success of Mrs. Bellamy's *Apology* in 1785 doubtless accounts for the appearance, two years later, in six duodecimo volumes, of the *Memoirs of Mrs. Sophia Baddeley, late of Drury Lane Theatre*. The book purports to have been written by the late actress's confidential friend, Mrs. Elizabeth Steele; and on the very first page we are informed, by way of guarantee of the authenticity of the *Memoirs*, that the author and the subject of the biography were acquainted from their earliest years; that they were brought up as children together, and sent to the same school; and that afterwards Mrs. Baddeley lived in Mrs. Steele's house for many years, and so unbosomed herself that the biographer became acquainted with every material circumstance of her life. Some critics, judging from internal evidence alone, have come to the conclusion that Mrs. Elizabeth Steele is as mythical a personage as the Mrs. Harris so perpetually quoted by Sairey Gamp. And they have found a more probable author for the work in the person of that industrious scribe Alexander Bicknell, who is said to have assisted Mrs. Bellamy in the composition of her volumes. If this be so (and it is probable enough) the reader who passes from the one to the other will be able to estimate how much assistance Mrs. Bellamy must have given instead of received; for Bicknell, with a vivacious actress at his elbow, though even then somewhat long-drawn-out, is at least tolerable; but Bicknell, left to his

own unaided exertions, is as dull as ditch-water. In the highly improbable account which the (supposed) author of the book incidentally gives of herself, we are asked to believe that, after a separation of some years' duration, she renewed her acquaintance with Mrs. Baddeley in 1769, and finding the latter plunged in dire distress, not only paid her debts, but took a house for her in St. James's Place, supplied her with a carriage, and endeavoured to keep her in the straight path of virtue. She declares that she loved Mrs. Baddeley as a sister; and continued to live with her after she found that erratic lady to be irreclaimable, always hoping against hope for some reformation. And we are assured that although she and Mr. Steele were on the best of terms, she did not live with her husband, who was apparently quite content to mind their children in some home conveniently out of the way, while she used up a 'little fortune' of her own earning in gadding about for years with Mrs. Baddeley. This part of the story is absurd and totally incredible; but the critics who have assumed, as Betsey Prig did concerning Mrs. Harris, that there never was 'no sech a person,' have gone somewhat too far; for we learn from Tate Wilkinson that Mrs. Baddeley did have such a friend and companion, whom he erroneously calls 'a Mrs. Stell.' From certain hints of his, however, and from some remarks by James Boaden on the same subject, we may infer that this attached friend was by no means the good angel to Mrs. Baddeley that the reputed author of the *Memoirs* represents herself to have been. Moreover, instead of being a lady of independent means, as she describes herself, she was more probably, as Dutton Cook pointed out, a sort of confidential abigail, or what used to be called 'convenient woman,' to Mrs. Baddeley. The presumption is that after Mrs. Baddeley's death, Alexander Bicknell extracted all the information he could from Mrs. Steele concerning her late friend or mistress's career, which she intermixed with a

highly fabulous account of her own participation therein, and that Bicknell worked this material up into the semblance of a biography, of which the authorship was attributed to her merely in order to give a greater air of authenticity to its scandalous revelations. Soon after the book had appeared, the newspapers of the 14th September, 1787, announced the death of the reputed author, at the Dolphin Inn, in Bishopsgate. It appears that she had been 'lately advertised for a forgery committed on a respectable house in the City,' and had taken refuge, under an assumed name, at the Dolphin. As soon as she had engaged a lodging there, she asked for a nurse; in less than a fortnight she died, 'in the most extreme agonies and distress,' and she was buried in Bishopsgate Churchyard as a common pauper. It is evidently necessary to read between the lines of a biography which sprang from so unreliable a source.

Sophia, daughter of Valentine Snow, serjeant-trumpeter to George II., was born at Westminster in 1745. She is said to have received a 'very genteel' education. But she rebelled against the strict musical training which her father insisted upon, and at the age of eighteen eloped with a smart young man named Baddeley, to whom she had been introduced by a sympathising neighbour. Baddeley had been brought up as a cook; but after wielding the spit in the kitchen of Samuel Foote, he had gone the grand tour as a gentleman's valet, and by that means picked up a superficial acquaintance with continental languages and manners. He was at this time playing low comedy parts (especially foreign footmen) at Drury Lane Theatre; and as his young wife had a fine voice and was very beautiful, he had little difficulty in procuring her an engagement there likewise. She made her first appearance on the stage, in the part of Ophelia, in April 1765, being described on the play-bills as 'a young gentlewoman.' Soon afterwards, in consequence of the sudden

illness of Mrs. Cibber, she had an opportunity of appearing as Cordelia in *King Lear*, when, owing to her never having previously seen the play acted, she produced a singular and unrehearsed effect. When Edgar came in as Mad Tom, his figure and manner gave her such an unexpected shock, that through real terror she screamed and fell down senseless on the stage. Even her biographer does not claim that Mrs. Baddeley ever became a great actress; but her face was her fortune; and within twelve months she had established herself as a popular favourite at Drury Lane, principally in genteel comedy, beyond which she was seldom ambitious enough to venture. She had a voice of great sweetness; and however much she may have disliked her father's lessons in music, they now stood her in good stead, for in addition to her salary at Drury Lane, which was presently raised to eight guineas a week, she was able to earn a further twelve guineas a week by singing at Ranelagh. For three years, says her biographer, with peculiar and perhaps intentionally significant phraseology, she lived with her husband 'without any public impeachment on her character.' She then committed herself by going down with a Jew named Mendez to his house in the country; and, not daring to return home, flew instead to Charles Holland, of Drury Lane Theatre, with whom she continued to live until his death no long time after. After Holland's death, the physician who had attended him, Dr. Hayes of Marlborough Street, took lodgings for her close by his house, and she lived under his protection for the following eight or nine months. Then there was trouble at the theatre, and Garrick insisted that she should leave Dr. Hayes. She agreed to do so, provided her salary were paid weekly into her own hands; but to this her husband objected, on the ground that he still remained liable for her debts. George Garrick (David's brother) seems to have rather warmly espoused the lady's cause in this dispute, and he and

Baddeley came within measurable distance of a duel in Hyde Park. Eventually, however, articles of separation were agreed upon, whereby (according to Mrs. Steele) Mrs. Baddeley was to receive her own salary on condition of paying the debts, amounting to £800, which had been incurred before the separation, and of indemnifying her husband against any which she might contract afterwards. This was in 1767. Notwithstanding their separation, Mr. and Mrs. Baddeley continued to perform at the same theatre; though they never exchanged a word with each other, except in their respective characters on the stage. To some people, this circumstance, which was of course well enough known to all theatre-goers, imparted an additional piquancy to certain plays in which they acted together. In *The Clandestine Marriage*, for instance, Baddeley (as the Swiss servant Canton) had to urge King (who played Lord Ogleby) to make love to Mrs. Baddeley (who took the part of Fanny). Before Fanny joins them on the stage, the accommodating Swiss has to exert all his ingenuity in recommending her to his lordship's notice. When the old beau admits that she is delectable, 'Oh, oui, my Lor, very delect,' returns the valet, 'she make doux yeux at you, my Lor.' In a later scene, the valet expresses huge delight at his success.

Lord Ogleby. Ah, la petite Fanchion! She's the thing; isn't she, Cant?

Canton. Dere is very good sympatie entre vous and dat young lady, my Lor.

Lord Ogleby. If she goes, I'll positively go too.

Canton. In the same post-chay, my Lor? You have no objection? Ha, ha, ha!

It does not seem excruciatingly funny; but the acting of this scene, combined with the known relations of the players, so pleased good King George III. and his Queen, that they sent a request next day to Mrs. Baddeley to go to Zoffany

and have her portrait painted in the character. Of course, she complied with the request; and of course such a distinguishing mark of royal approbation greatly extended her fame. She now not only drew crowded houses in the theatre but, as her biographer phrases it, 'became caressed, adored, and followed by the first persons in the state'—which, being interpreted, means by all the rakes and profligate young men about town.

Even before her separation from her husband, she had been frequently visited by H.R.H. the Duke of York; and that sentimental prince, before he left the kingdom, had graciously presented her with a lock of his hair—a precious gift, which, we are told, she carefully preserved through all the vicissitudes of her chequered career, and bequeathed at her death to one who would treasure it with equal reverence. Many and various were the other candidates for her favour, including Sir Cecil Bishop, an old man verging on eighty years of age, who sent her a valuable service of plate by way of inducing her to pay him a visit at his country seat in Sussex, and who was bitterly disappointed when his charmer left him on the first day immediately after dinner, and drove on to find younger and more congenial society at Bright-helmstone. It was about this time that the Hon. William Hanger 'gained her affections'; but this gentleman was incautious enough one day to take his brother on a visit to the volatile lady, with the result that the Hon. John promptly cut the Hon. William out. Mrs. Steele says that—

'the Hon. John Hanger, on obtaining Mrs. Baddeley's heart, made her the most ample and unreserved promises of liberality, and pledged himself by the most solemn vows to give her all the support his fortune or affection could afford or contrive. He took a handsome lodging in Dean Street, Soho, hired her a carriage at his own expense, and his assiduity and tenderness soon gained him her affection.'

In fact, so devoted did she become to the Hon. John that, when his funds ran short, as they very soon did, she devoted the whole of her earnings, amounting to £20 a week, to the purposes of their joint housekeeping. Even with this help, however, they soon got into debt to the extent of £700; and when creditors pressed, and there was no money left to pay them with, her lover, in spite of all her entreaties, declared that he must relinquish her. When he set to work to pack up his trunks, she fell senseless to the floor, and when she recovered consciousness, the Hon. John had taken his departure. Notwithstanding that this ardent lover had occasionally beaten her until her neck and arms were black, and once knocked out one of her double teeth, his loss caused such distraction that she made an attempt on her life. Persuading a neighbouring chemist to let her have three hundred drops of laudanum on the plea that she was in the habit of taking some every night and wanted a supply to take away with her into the country, she rushed back into the house in Dean Street and took the whole of it in one dose. However, three physicians were not in vain; and as Mrs. Steele appeared (so she says) at this opportune moment, paid all the debts, took a house in St. James's Place, and provided Mrs. Baddeley with a carriage, that suicidal lady was at length persuaded that life was after all worth living.

In one place, Mrs. Steele informs us that though not possessing the superlative beauty of Mrs. Baddeley, she had not been without her temptations; but, thank God! she had a mind above them all, and had always conducted herself with that propriety every woman ought, which naturally made her ever anxious to keep her friend within the rules of virtue and decorum. But she must certainly have despised 'a fugitive and cloistered virtue,' that never sallies out and seeks its adversary, almost as much as Milton did; for her account of the way in which she and her friend

conducted themselves in that St. James's Street house reads like the annals of a bagnio. They were no sooner settled there than Lord Pigot became a constant visitor, as they professed to imagine, out of 'pure esteem and friendship,' so that when, after a little, he declared his love for Mrs. Baddeley, she was greatly surprised, and told him so. When Lord Sefton heard of the desertion of Mr. Hanger, he also came, and instantly proposed to pay her debts and settle £400 a year on her. As an earnest of his future liberality, he offered her a note for £350, which she unhesitatingly accepted, though declining any such permanent arrangement as he wished to make. Lord Palmerston, who had seen her at Ranelagh, one day invited himself to tea, and was promptly asked (being at the time one of the Lords of the Admiralty) to give some promotion to a lieutenant in whom Mrs. Baddeley happened to be interested. On another occasion, we are told, Lord March called to invite them to dinner. But this amorous peer, as he was being shown in to the parlour, saw a maid-servant who took his fancy going upstairs, and went in pursuit of the damsel. The girl did not fancy him, apparently, for she pushed him away, and he not only fell from top to bottom of a flight of stairs, but also received the contents of her bucket over his fine clothes. Mrs. Steele and Mrs. Baddeley came rushing out to the rescue, and, as became ladies of stringent virtue in a house of the most perfect decorum, they apologised to his lordship, cleaned his clothes, and accepted his invitation to dinner.

It would be wearisome to enumerate the various peers and other persons of quality who invited themselves to tea, made handsome presents (usually in the form of bank-notes), and in most cases also made offers of a settlement; but special mention must be made of one peer who plays a very prominent part in these *Memoirs*. Lord Melbourne,

who was then about twenty-one years of age, and had been recently married, introduced himself to Mrs. Baddeley by a letter, in which, 'as a proof of his esteem,' he enclosed a bill for £300. She accepted the money, but at the same time assured his lordship that her present state of mind put it out of her power to meet his wishes. The fact was that at the moment the Hon. John Hanger was rather in the way. He had called at the house in St. James's Street, and when Mrs. Steele refused to let him see Mrs. Baddeley, had cried and bewailed his sorrow with so loud a voice, that she had come into the room in a relenting mood, and after at first permitting his visits 'as a friend only,' had soon restored him to his former footing, so that he was now hanging about the place all day and every day. Mrs. Steele soon saw that this was not good business; so she took a house in the King's Road, Chelsea, and declared (so she assures us) that she would go and live there by herself unless Hanger's visits were discontinued. Why it was necessary for her to take another house, instead of simply going home to her husband and children, she does not condescend to explain. However, what she says is that a threat to leave Mrs. Baddeley almost always brought that lady round to her wishes; and in the present instance a promise was made to relinquish the objectionable Hanger. One day, on returning from the Chelsea house, which she was preparing for occupation, she found Lord Melbourne closeted with Mrs. Baddeley in St. James's Place; and when her friend came out to greet her in the hall, she remonstrated so loudly on the impropriety of such a proceeding, that Lord Melbourne, to avoid a scene, threw up the parlour-window and leaped out into the street, having first placed bank-notes for £200 on the table, by way of atonement for his intrusion. Next morning came a letter from his lordship, apologising for his precipitate retreat, and requesting an interview in

Henry the Seventh's Chapel at Westminster. Mrs. Steele advised that no notice should be taken of this letter, but finding that Mrs. Baddeley was determined to keep the appointment, said she would go also. She lectured Lord Melbourne, we are told, on the impropriety of his visits to Mrs. Bellamy at her house; but he assured her that he had no other object than to be of service in helping Mrs. Baddeley to quit a fatiguing profession which, she had told him, had become extremely distasteful to her; and as he there and then presented that lady with more bank-notes, to the value of £300, Mrs. Steele 'was in some measure prevailed with, and his lordship's visits were permitted at our house.' Of course the Hon. John Hanger was now told to discontinue his visits; although, as he informed Mrs. Baddeley he was now a ruined man, in consequence of a run of ill-luck at Almack's, she gave him a parting gift of £200—presumably from the last bundle of bank-notes received from Lord Melbourne. When Melbourne learned, on his next visit, that she had definitely parted with Hanger, he was so pleased that he left yet another £200 worth of bank-notes on the table before taking his departure. Apart from any other consideration, these presents of money of course only served to encourage Mrs. Baddeley's extravagance. They also helped to give her an exaggerated idea of her own importance; so that when Garrick refused an increase of salary she asked for, she told him she would not appear on his stage again until he gave her better terms. Lord Melbourne applauded this resolution; and said he would give her three times as much as she could earn by her profession. And she not only broke with Garrick, but at the same time gave up her engagement at Ranelagh also. After two years she found it necessary to return both to Ranelagh and to the theatre; but, in the meantime, having the command, as she supposed, of Lord Melbourne's purse, she launched out into greater

extravagance than ever. Her biographer gives us a specimen of a day's shopping. First she went to King's, in Covent Garden, where she paid £200 for a new coach-lining and hammer-cloth, and sundry other silks at two guineas a yard. Then she drove to Prince's, in Tavistock Street, where she made purchases of various kinds to a large amount; then to Jeafferson's, at Charing Cross, where she bought a pair of diamond earrings for £300; and, after then calling at the milliner's and one or two other shops, returned home £700 the poorer for one day's purchases.

The house in Grafton Street, we are told, was very handsomely furnished. The walls of the drawing-room were hung with silk curtains, drawn up in festoons, in imitation of Madame du Barry's at Versailles; and everything else was proportionally elegant and costly. At one time she kept nine servants. Her liveries were a superfine dark blue cloth, lined with scarlet, scarlet collars and cuffs, and two rows of scolloped silver lace; waistcoats the same, and silver-laced hats. She always wore two watches, one being a beautiful little French toy, set with diamonds, worth £200, which hung as a trinket from her chain. We hear incidentally of four diamond necklaces, a diamond bow worth £400, enamelled bracelets set round with brilliants, and rings, both for ears and fingers, without number. And she was always wanting fresh things. She would go to the mercer's, pay thirty or forty guineas for a sacque coat of rich silk (more often than not ordering two or three more at the same time), wear it perhaps twice, and then give it away to her maid. She once bought a whole piece of very fine muslin, plated with silver leaves, for £48; had it made up into a dress for a masquerade, wore it for one night only; and the next day cut it up to make into dolls' things for some children. Nothing pleased her for long. One day a new set of decorations would be put up in her house; and the next day it would be all pulled

down and replaced by something different. And whatever she saw and fancied, that she must have, whatever the cost might be. Calling one day at her mantua-maker's she was shown a dress just made for Mrs. Abington, and nothing would satisfy her till she had posted off to that lady's house and persuaded her to part with it for twenty guineas. Then, finding that Mrs. Abington was thinking of removing from her charming house at Hammersmith, Mrs. Baddeley must needs immediately buy all the furniture and take over the lease, notwithstanding that she had already two houses on her hands. After her temporary retirement from the theatre, her dissipation was more fast and furious than ever. Operas, plays, masquerades, Vauxhall, Ranelagh, and other diversions occupied her whole time; and her companion declares that—

‘Often in summer time have we returned from a place of amusement at three in the morning, and, without going to rest, have changed our dress and gone off in our phaeton ten or twelve miles to breakfast; and have kept this up for five or six days together. In the morning to an exhibition or an auction; this followed by an airing into Hyde Park; after that to dress, then to the play; from thence, before the entertainment was over, away to Ranelagh; return perhaps at two; and after supper and a little chat, the horses ordered, and to Epsom, or some other place, again to breakfast.’

Of course, no human frame could stand this sort of thing for any length of time; neither could any one man's purse. She not only spent all the money Melbourne gave her as fast as she got it, and accumulated considerable debts at the same time, but also added to her stock of jewellery and furniture from other sources. We hear of her buying £56 worth of books in a shop in Piccadilly on one occasion, when Lord Harrington, who happened to be in the shop at the time, asked to be allowed to pay for them, and when this offer was politely declined, begged to be allowed to present her with a set of books of his own selection. On another

occasion, being at a sale at Christie's, she expressed great admiration of a picture of a miser, whereupon Mr. Thomas Stanley (brother of Lord Derby) at once bought it for her; and when, shortly after, she likewise fancied two fruit pieces, these also were bought for her by her old admirer, Sir Cecil Bishop, already mentioned as the donor of a service of silver plate. Although her biographer professes to have a moral object in view, she (or he) never blames Mrs. Baddeley for accepting presents, whether in goods or money, from any of her numerous admirers, but only for the reckless manner in which she disposed of her ill-gotten gains. Few persons in the world experienced its smiles, we are told, more than Mrs. Baddeley did at this time. Rank and fortune bowed before her; and it rested with herself whether she would be mistress of a competence or not. A little discretion, not to say frugality, in husbanding what she received at this time would have afforded her a comfortable resource for a future day; and (so Mrs. Elizabeth Steele or Mr. Alexander Bicknell has the courage to set it down in black and white) would have made her a happy woman in after years, when all her friends had deserted her! But the reader will have no difficulty in drawing for himself a more satisfactory moral from the story.

Every place of public resort frequented by people of fashion appears to have been open to Mrs. Baddeley, and the single attempt that was made to exclude her ignominiously failed in consequence of the championship of her numerous influential admirers. Mrs. Steele's account of this incident runs as follows:—

‘When the Pantheon was first opened with concerts, &c., the proprietors wished to exclude every person but those of rank and fortune; and by no means to admit any woman of slight character, or any of the players. Mrs. Bellamy being then on the stage, and of some consequence among them, she was, with some others,

pointed out as an improper person to be admitted. This getting to the ears of Mr. William Hanger, Mr. Conway, and some few more of their friends, they met at Almack's on the occasion, and twenty of the nobility agreed to attend at the Pantheon, at the door she designed to enter at, determining that nothing should prevent her admittance. They accordingly requested of us to go the first evening it was opened in chairs, for as an extra number of constables were ordered to attend, and as chairs were admitted under the portico, it would be better in case of a riot than to expose our carriage and horses to the insolence of a mob. . . . When we reached the place, I believe there were fifty gentlemen in waiting ready to protect us, with swords by their sides; and when I got out I passed the constables uninterrupted, but as soon as Mrs. Bellamy got out of her chair, all the constables' staves were crossed, and, pulling off their hats, they with great civility said their orders were to admit no players. At this instant, every gentleman there present, the greater part of whom were noblemen, drew their swords, and declared one and all that if they did not instantly make way and let her pass they would run them through. Way was immediately made, and Mrs. Baddeley and I were handed in without any interruption.'

Nor was this quite the end of the matter: for the champions of fair frailty would not sheathe their swords, nor allow the performance to proceed, until the managers of the place had humbly begged Mrs. Baddeley's pardon and rescinded their regulation; whereupon an account of the result was immediately sent to Mrs. Abington, who presently came, and on her being admitted without any question, the noblemen from Almack's were apparently satisfied that no nonsensical notions of morality would afterwards exclude anybody whose presence could in any way add to their pleasure.

As we have seen, however, the numerous diversions of London were insufficient to fill Mrs. Baddeley's cup of pleasure, and during the two years that she was free from the stage, she was perpetually rushing about the country, always travelling with four horses going as fast as the postilions could urge them, and invariably, when on long

journeys, travelling night and day. About 1772 or 1773 she and Mrs. Steele made a jaunt to Paris, where her beauty attracted as much attention as in England. At the Comédie, the French nobility crowded the passages of the theatre to see her pass out to her carriage, and on the quay at Calais, when she was returning, quite a small army of officers attended her to the boat. In Paris she bought caps, handkerchiefs, ruffles, trimmings, fans, gloves, shoes, stockings, and trinkets in great abundance, so as to have everything in the height of fashion on her return to England. Everybody smuggled in those days of all-round tariffs; and by giving a fee of five guineas to an official at Calais, she got her baggage passed through there without being searched, together with a note to a similar official at Dover, who, in return for a further five guineas, passed her trunks through the English custom-house without any overhauling. In consequence of a little indiscretion of her own, however, the attention of some other (un-fee'd) custom-house officers was attracted before she could get safely to London, and the whole of her baggage was seized and detained, with the result that, to avoid payment of the heavy penalty, she was forced to abandon not only her Paris purchases but everything else as well. Another result of this trip to Paris, was that she shortly afterwards received a visit in London from M. le Duc, the French king's tailor, who said he was commissioned by his Majesty of France to pay her any sum of money she might immediately need, and to promise a liberal provision for life, if she would return to Paris and place herself under the royal protection. This offer was civilly declined, on the ground that Mrs. Baddeley would not like to leave her own country. She used to say that she hated the French, and would rather be a menial servant in England than the mistress of the French king. But she was not a little proud of the offer

all the same, and took care that all her acquaintances should hear of it.

If at any time there happened to be no place of public diversion sufficiently attractive for her, Mrs. Baddeley would fly off in pursuit of some whimsy of her own. She heard one day, for example, that there was an empty house at Wandsworth said to be haunted; and the hope of a fresh sensation from the sight of a ghost made her instantly determine to find that house and sit up in it all night. Taking five maids and three men-servants, and providing themselves with wood and coal, and wine and provisions, she and Mrs. Steele, after staining their faces and hands and dressing themselves so as to pass for a party of gypsies, set out by boat for Wandsworth. But this expedition was not altogether a success; for after wandering about the neighbourhood for hours, and inquiring of every person they met, no such thing as a haunted house could they anywhere hear of, and they were forced to content themselves with the comparatively mild diversion of telling the fortunes of the country wenches and silly servant girls. Mrs. Steele alleges that her friend was fond of reading; but if these *Memoirs* give anything like a true picture of her life, she can never have given herself half an hour a week to sit down quietly over a book. She was fond of canaries and of cats; but the petting of these creatures was no hindrance either to gadding about abroad or to the reception of innumerable visitors at home. One of her cats, named 'Cuddle,' was always politely inquired after by the beaux who courted its mistress's favour; and this pampered animal was often her companion when journeying about from place to place. Mrs. Steele observes, with some chagrin, that on one occasion when their coach was overturned, and she was so bruised as to need the aid of a surgeon at the nearest town, Mrs. Baddeley's sole concern

was for the safety of the four-footed companion, and until she had satisfied herself that 'Cuddle' was safe and uninjured, she would not pay the slightest attention to the hurts of any other creature.

All the while that Mrs. Baddeley was living in this whirl of giddy gaiety at Lord Melbourne's expense, she was in receipt of numerous offers from other infatuated admirers, from whom, as already mentioned, she did not scruple to accept presents, of jewellery, of plate, of pictures, of money. Also, as her biographer admits, she usually had some favourite visitor of her own choice, 'to whom she might, when she pleased, bestow her unbought favours.' In particular, she was for a long time, and notwithstanding his ill-usage of her, unable to shake herself free of an infatuation for the Hon. John Hanger. Lord Melbourne was by no means a brilliant young nobleman; but, says the lady's biographer, 'his Lordship must have loved her, for he always shed tears at parting with her; ever called her his dearest love, and seldom left her without blessing her sweet face.' He also seldom left her without leaving what she valued far above blessing, namely a good round sum in money. If Mrs. Steele, who appears to have occasionally realised that they might both of them some day be in need of an old-age pension, ever ventured to suggest that her extravagant expenditure should be slightly moderated, Mrs. Baddeley would invariably reply to the effect: 'Lord Melbourne has no other desire than to give me everything I wish for, and as I shall have his love and friendship as long as I live, I shall never want.' But even Melbourne, simple as he was, came to see at last that she was playing fast and loose with him; and when, just as he was incurring enormous expense in fitting up a new house for himself and his wife in Piccadilly, Mrs. Baddeley requested him to settle debts which she had incurred to the extent of several

thousands of pounds, his ardour cooled; and although there was no sudden rupture, his visits and his donations became much less frequent. In consequence there was soon acute trouble with her creditors; and partly to avoid arrest, partly to escape from her old lover Hanger, who had now succeeded his father as Lord Coleraine, she accepted an invitation to visit Colonel Luttrell, another of her admirers, at his place in Ireland. Coleraine discovered her retreat, followed her to Luttrell's house, promised to behave better in future, and offered, if she would return to him, to pay all her debts and settle £500 a year on her for life. She was now as infatuated with Luttrell as she had previously been with Coleraine; but as the former was too poor to pay her debts, she agreed to return to London with the latter; privately promising Luttrell, however, that as soon as the other had freed her from her creditors she would immediately come back to Ireland and to him. Lord Coleraine, however, according to her story, beat her and locked her up in her room on the very first night of their arrival in London, and next morning she ran away to her friend Mrs. Steele, and refused ever to enter Coleraine's doors again. Lord Melbourne, as might be expected, now held entirely aloof, and on being applied to for money, definitely declared that he had done with Mrs. Baddeley. Still, it was quite useless to talk to her of economy. She preferred to pawn her diamonds for £1000 to stave off the most pressing of her creditors, and went on for a time much as usual, hiring jewellery whenever she wanted to make a show in the theatre or at a masquerade. At length both she and Mrs. Steele were arrested and lodged in a sponging-house. Mrs. Steele bailed herself out, and went about amongst Mrs. Baddeley's aristocratic friends soliciting help. Both Lord Melbourne and Lord Coleraine said they would not give Mrs. Baddeley another shilling; and equally unsatisfactory,

if more polite, refusals came from the Duke of Queensberry, the Duke of Northumberland, Lord Harrington, and other of her professed admirers. Then Mrs. Steele drew up a letter for a subscription, and by tens and twenties, from sixteen noblemen and gentlemen, whose names and donations are set forth in detail in the *Memoirs*, she got together £400: to this the Hon. John Damer added £500; and a hat sent round at Ranelagh realised another £315. It does not appear that this money was used to pay off the debt for which Mrs. Baddeley had been arrested; but rather less than half of it sufficed to free Mrs. Steele, who then bailed out her friend; and we may presume that in the meantime they lived on the balance.

Being an extremely superstitious person, Mrs. Baddeley thought her present circumstances warranted her in having recourse to a fortune-teller, and sent for a well-known practitioner of the art, named Jones, who lived in the appropriate neighbourhood of the Old Bailey. This man came to her one Monday morning, and after receiving a fee of a guinea and a half, told her that if she would walk in St. James's Park between the hours of one and two on the following Wednesday she would there see a rather handsome, tall, thin, dark gentleman of genteel appearance, wearing a gold chain round his neck, who would be of service to her. Of course Mrs. Baddeley went at the time named; and when she saw a gentleman there who in every point answered to the description of the fortune-teller, she exclaimed—'My God! that's the man! The fellow who told me must certainly be the devil!' When this gentleman accosted her, and informed her that his name was Sayer, that he was one of the Sheriffs of the City of London, that he had long wished to know her, and that his office would enable him to protect her from any such inconvenience as she had recently suffered at the hands of Sheriff's

officers, Mrs. Baddeley discerned the hand of Fate in the encounter. It never seems to have occurred to her that Sayer had been in communication with his fortune-telling neighbour in the Old Bailey, and had concerted this little plan to obtain an introduction. It was suggested by Sayer that a house should be taken for Mrs. Baddeley in Cleveland Row, St. James's, in the name of Mrs. Steele, and on his promise to be responsible for the rent. He did not, at first, live there; but he came daily, and frequently brought a number of his friends to dinner. We are told that he entertained his friends 'chiefly with beef-steaks, which he would broil himself on the dining-room fire, and it made such a stink and dirt that I was ready to go distracted.' After a short interval, Sayer took up his quarters in the house altogether; and Mrs. Steele, unable to endure his behaviour, and finding that none of the old fashionable connection would condescend to call at the house where he posed as master, reluctantly left her old friend, and apparently saw no more of her for a considerable time.

In 1773, after an absence of two years, Mrs. Baddeley re-appeared at Drury Lane theatre on the occasion of Miss Younge's benefit, and was received with so much applause from all parts of the house that it was more than ten minutes before she could go on with her part. Garrick thereupon offered her an engagement at fourteen guineas a week, and she once more became a member of his company. Soon after this, Sayer married an elderly woman of some fortune, and Mrs. Baddeley took up for a time with the actor Brereton. Then she went to live with Webster, another member of the Drury Lane company, with whom she remained for several years and by whom she had two children. After Webster's death she lived with his man-servant, and when Mrs. Steele again met with her in 1781 or 1782, she was living with this man, in a mean little house in Pimlico,

in a state of poverty, if not of utter destitution; for her Drury Lane engagement had come to an end, and there appeared to be no prospect of any other. After this, she sang for a short time at an Exhibition in Lisle Street, called the 'Eidophusicon'; and subsequently obtained a good engagement in Ireland, which unfortunately, however, lasted only for one season, because her attraction by no means came up to the manager's expectations. In 1783 she went to Edinburgh, whence Tate Wilkinson brought her down to give a few performances for him at the York Spring Meeting of that year. She acted Clarissa, Polly, Rosetta, Imogen, and several of her principal characters at York, and was, as Tate tells us in his *Wandering Patentee*, much admired. But on the last night there she almost entirely lost her credit.

'She was very lame, and to make that worse, was so stupidly intoxicated with laudanum that it was with great difficulty she could finish the performance.'

Tate adds that the quantity of laudanum she habitually took was 'incredible'; but that in spite of this, and of the fact that she ate scarcely any food, her complexion retained its beauty to the last. When his company returned to Leeds, where Mrs. Baddeley was booked to perform four or five nights, he declares that, what with illness, laziness, and inebriety, he was never certain of her performance from one night to another. She received 'very genteel' payment from him, but what she did with her money he could never make out, for 'when she was to return to Scotland she was in truth reduced to beggary, not worth a single shilling.' And then follows a sentence which needs to be borne in mind by the reader of her *Memoirs*:—'Her friend and companion, a Mrs. Stell (*sic*), was with her, who, I fancy, had always occasion for such sums as that unfortunate

woman received.' She continued to play in Edinburgh, at a comparatively poor salary, for the following two years, and when at length consumption rendered her incapable of the exertion, the other performers there generously subscribed a small sum weekly for her support, until she died on July 1st, 1786.

A word or two in conclusion must be given to poor Robert Baddeley, who survived his beautiful but misguided wife for more than eight years. He made for himself a special line of business in what may be called broken-English parts; and Boaden says that his Swiss and his Jews, his Germans, and his Frenchmen, were admirably characteristic, being 'finely generalised, and played from actual knowledge of the people, not from a casual snatch at individual peculiarities.' He was also the original 'Moses' in the *School for Scandal*, and in addition to such parts as those of 'Dr. Druid,' 'Dr. Caius,' 'Fluellen,' and 'M. le Médecin,' Genest mentions over eighty characters which he represented during the thirty-six years of his theatrical career. His salary was never large; but, in striking contrast to his wife, he was industrious and saving. He died in harness, falling back in a fit one day in November 1794, while dressing for his part of 'Moses,' and expiring on the following day. He is chiefly remembered for certain peculiar bequests in his will. A house in New Store Street was bequeathed (subject to a life interest for 'his faithful friend and companion, Miss Catherine Strickland, generally called and known by the name of Baddeley') to the society established for the relief of indigent persons belonging to Drury Lane Theatre. His freehold house and ground at Moulsey were left as an asylum for decayed actors and actresses, who were to be allowed a small pension each when the net produce of the property should exceed a specified sum. And special care was to be taken to have the words 'Baddeley's Asylum'

prominently displayed on the front of the house. By way of counteracting certain slanderous aspersions on his conduct, and 'to prevent the world from looking on his memory in the villainous point of view as set forth in certain books, pamphlets, etc.'—by which he doubtless chiefly meant the *Memoirs* by Mrs. Elizabeth Steele,—his executors were directed to publish every year a letter of his, respecting his disagreement with his unhappy wife, which had appeared in the *General Advertiser* for April 20, 1790. And, finally, the interest of £100 worth of Consolidated Bank Annuities was devoted to the purchase of a Twelfth-cake, wine, and punch, which the ladies and gentlemen of Drury Lane Theatre were requested to partake of in the great green-room of the theatre every Twelfth-night, in memory of a brother actor who evidently wished them well, and desired that they should continue to think well of him. The ladies and gentlemen of Drury Lane Theatre on Twelfth-night are scarcely the kind of performers which Robert Baddeley had in his mind's eye; but every Twelfth-night his three pounds' worth of cake and wine and punch is duly brought forth and, with kindly feelings we may hope, by them consumed.



Elizabeth Farren, Countess of Derby.

FROM THE ENGRAVING BY KNIGHT OF THE PORTRAIT BY SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE

ELIZABETH FARREN (COUNTESS OF DERBY)

NOTWITHSTANDING that Elizabeth Farren was the Oldfield of her day—*par excellence*, the fine lady of her time, and notwithstanding, moreover, that while she was the second actress to be received within the ranks of the English peerage, she was the first to attain that dignity without any previous scandal being attached to her name, the materials for her *Life* are far more scanty than those of many a more obscure actress. But although we may take it as an involuntary testimony to the unexampled propriety of her conduct that her biographers had so poor a story to tell, we may be permitted to regret that, at the time when at least some authentic information must have been procurable, two such very poor biographers were the only persons to take the matter in hand. Soon after her marriage to Lord Derby in 1797 there appeared a little eighteen-penny book of thirty-one pages, by a writer who called himself ‘Petronius Arbiter,’ which was dignified with the title of *Memoirs of the present Countess of Derby*, wherein the writer, somewhat satirically, not to say maliciously, gave a brief and not altogether accurate account of the new peeress’s origin and theatrical career. This was quickly followed by another little book of about the same size, entitled *The Testimony of Truth to Exalted Merit: or a Biographical Sketch of the Rt. Hon. the Countess of Derby*, which purports to be an authentic refutation of the foregoing ‘false and scandalous libel.’ But this latter production, likewise, is by no means unimpeachably accurate, and

if it was an 'inspired' biography must have been intentionally meagre and vague. 'Petronius Arbiter' asserted that Elizabeth Farren's father began his career in life by hammering drugs for an apothecary in Cork, that he afterwards joined a company of strolling players, and subsequently got an engagement to play second- and third-rate parts in the Liverpool theatre. It is also said that as soon as he found himself in possession of a regular salary, Farren took to drink; that he generally contrived to walk on soberly in the first act, but more often than not staggered off quite drunk before the expiration of the fifth. On one occasion, we are told, when in the course of his part he had to tear up a certain letter, he was so tipsy that after exclaiming seven or eight times—'and thus I tear the letter,' and making as many attempts to do so without success, he suddenly altered the text of his author to—'and thus I throw the letter from me,' and having performed this easier operation, enabled the play to proceed. 'Petronius Arbiter' goes on to relate that about the year 1758 Farren married the daughter of a Liverpool publican, who was herself ambitious to make a figure on the stage, and that when the eldest of his children was only ten or eleven years of age he died, leaving his wife and family in great distress. In the *Testimony of Truth* we are informed that although Mr. Farren had his failings, he was not at all the kind of character which that 'hireling' scribbler 'Petronius' had represented. He had been regularly apprenticed, and had subsequently practised as a surgeon and apothecary in Cork; had married, late in life, the daughter, not of a publican, but of an eminent brewer of Liverpool; and that he died during Elizabeth's early childhood, and was remembered by all who had known him as 'a man of probity, urbanity, and pleasantness.' There is no hint in this 'refutation' that Farren ever had any connection with the

stage; but neither is there any explicit denial of Petronius's assertion that he was a strolling player. Dr. Doran tells a story (on what authority does not appear) according to which Farren in 1769 was manager of a strolling company, and being at Salisbury on Christmas eve that year, accompanied by Elizabeth, while Mrs. Farren and the other children remained in Liverpool, was put in the lock-up as a rogue and a vagabond, and that on Christmas morning the future countess carried to him a bowl of hot milk for breakfast, which the actor drank through the cage-bars of his prison window. This sounds like a romance; but in John Bernard's *Retrospections* there is a story which shows that Farren, far from having died when Elizabeth was ten or eleven years of age, was very much alive in 1783, when his daughter was at the top of her profession, kept her carriage, and lived in a fine house in the most fashionable part of the West End of London. Bernard, in the course of his own wanderings, lodged in 1783 at a hairdresser's in the principal street of Sligo, where, scratched on one of the panes of his chamber window he found some lines of verse which induced him to inquire the name and history of their author. He was told that the lines had been traced by a Mr. Farren, who had visited Sligo, as a member of Shepherd's company, in the previous summer; and he was further informed that Farren was as distinguished for his superior education and refinement as Shepherd was for his ignorance and a brutal and overbearing disposition. The following lines, it was supposed, had been written by Farren after some more than ordinary exhibition of his manager's brutality:—

‘How different David’s fate from mine !
 His blessèd, mine is evil—
 His *Shepherd* was the Lord divine,
 My *Shepherd* is the Devil.’

Bernard goes on to say:—

‘This gentleman was the father of that accomplished actress, the late Countess of Derby; and, setting aside the intrinsic merit of the impromptu, I was induced to think that if the *pane* could be conveyed to that lady it would give her some pleasure. With this view I offered my host a fair sum to extract it; but he would not consent, for he considered a certain luck to consist in its safe preservation. “Mr. Burnard,” said he, “ever since Mr. Farren wrote those verses, I have niver wanted a lodger!”’

Whatever her father may have been when alive, however, and whenever he may have died, there is no doubt that her early days were passed in great poverty, and sometimes distress. There is no doubt also that both her mother and sister and herself belonged to a strolling company. The writer of the refutation of ‘Petronius’ does not deny the early poverty of Mrs. Farren and her family, alleging (truly enough) that there is no necessity to disguise the truth, seeing that ‘it is far from being dishonourable to any person of exalted rank that, though title and affluence now surround him, he or his ancestors once dwelt in a cottage’; but he evidently feels so uncomfortable in admitting the fact, that he seeks for analogous instances in Pope Sixtus v. and other illustrious persons. It is admitted that Miss Farren began to earn her living at the early age of fourteen; but the strolling is repudiated, and we are assured that ‘the manner in which she commenced her theatrical career, the companies with which she was connected, and the situation which she filled in them, were as respectable as an engagement out of London could possibly afford.’ That she made her *début* in a strolling company, or ever associated with one afterwards, is declared to be an invention of the malignant ‘hireling scribbler’ already mentioned. But what little independent evidence there is tends to prove that both Mrs. Farren and her two daughters belonged

to companies of the itinerant variety. As soon as they were capable Mrs. Farren put her children on the stage, where Peggy (afterwards Mrs. Knight) is said to have shown great vivacity and sprightliness in the parts of girls, chambermaids, etc., while Betsey received great applause as Edward the Fifth in *Richard the Third*, and in similar boy's parts. 'Petronius Arbiter' says they belonged to a 'sharing' company of which the following was one of the attendant disadvantages:—

'The scenery and wardrobe of a company of this kind cannot be supposed to be very ponderous articles; if, therefore, at any time, the funds of the company were so low as not to furnish the necessary sum for the hire of any kind of vehicle to convey the live and dead stock from town to town, each member took a portion of the scenery or wardrobe on his back, and trudged on to where they next intended to establish themselves, nor were the ladies excused on such occasions. Whenever this circumstance occurred in a company to which for many years Mrs. Farren belonged, it always fell to the lot of Lady Derby to carry the drum!'

According to an old play-bill preserved by Tate Wilkinson in his *Wandering Patentee*, the three Farrens were engaged in Whiteley's company when playing at the theatre in George Yard, Wakefield, in 1774. Mrs. Farren's name appears as one of the masquers; Miss K. Farren took the part of a servant-maid in the pantomime of *Old Mother Redcap*; and Miss E. Farren, who was Columbine in the pantomime, also sang between the acts of another piece. Soon after this they all got an engagement with Younger of the Liverpool theatre, who appears to have taken an especial liking to Elizabeth. His corps was a very respectable one, and he himself is described as 'a gentleman not more generally known and esteemed for his intimate acquaintance with theatrical concerns, and the correctness of his judgment, than for the suavity of his manners, the generosity of his disposition, and the excellence of his

heart.' She made her first appearance in the Liverpool theatre in 1774 as Rosetta in *Love in a Village*, and a short time after scored a distinct success as Lady Townley in *The Provoked Husband*. At this time she cannot have been more than fifteen years of age. From 1774 to the beginning of 1777 she continued to perform at Liverpool and other provincial theatres, particularly at Chester and at Shrewsbury, 'always under the eye of her paternal friend Mr. Younger, who treated her as a child of his own, and rendered the circumstances of her mother and sister . . . comfortable, though not abundant.' Younger, indeed, had her success so much at heart that, to his own manifest disadvantage, he interested himself to get her an engagement with Colman at the Haymarket.

In the spring of 1777 she came up to London, accompanied by her mother and her only surviving sister, and on the 10th of June made her first appearance at the little theatre in the Haymarket as Miss Hardcastle in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*. Boaden says she was greatly admired, and that it was obvious from the first that her lovely expression, her intelligence, and the air of fashion about her, would, at no very distant period, place her in the seat of Mrs. Abington, whenever that lady should retire. Other parts in which she gained great applause in the course of her first year were those of Maria in Murphy's *Citizen*, Rosetta in *Love in a Village*, Miss Tittup in Garrick's *Bon Ton*, and Rosina Lovell in Colman's *Suicide*. She attracted general admiration, and amongst those who were loudest in her praise was Charles James Fox. Mrs. Charles Mathews says that Fox's visits to the green-room were so frequent, and his attentions so pointed, that before long his undoubted devotion to Miss Farren became a matter of notoriety both within and without the theatre. In the green-room—

‘It was perceptible that the object of these assiduities received her illustrious lover with modest welcome,—which, however, could not be misconstrued into any undue encouragement of a sentiment which was naturally flattering to her pride, even had her heart remained unmoved. This, as it was believed, *mutual* attachment became the topic of general interest, and . . . expectation stood on tiptoe for the moment when it should be proclaimed that the British Demosthenes had given his hand where he had so evidently bestowed his heart.’

But by and by the statesman’s ardour cooled, and the green-room knew him no more. In the *Testimony of Truth* biography there is only a brief and rather enigmatical reference to this episode. Much, we are told, has been said of Fox’s *penchant* for Miss Farren; but ‘if it ever subsisted it certainly was of short continuance; and that it was so must undoubtedly be regarded as highly honourable to herself.’ ‘Petronius Arbiter,’ however, is ready with an explanation of the great orator’s defection. The character which she took in Colman’s *Suicide*, during her second season at the Haymarket, was a ‘breeches’ part; and he informs us that her tall, slim figure showed to such disadvantage in male attire that the revelation effectually cured Fox of his infatuation. Whether this be true or not, her appearance in the ‘breeches’ part, for which she was in no way suited, somewhat lessened her attractiveness to the theatre-going public; and it was not until she appeared as Lady Townley in *The Provoked Husband* that her reputation as an actress was re-established. Curiously enough, she had been very reluctant to assume this character, although at the age of fifteen she had played it with much applause at Liverpool; and it was only by Parsons’ urgent representations that she was persuaded to play the part for his benefit. The result certainly justified his selection; for it was this character which fixed her once for all in the estimation of the critics and the public as an actress of distinction and refinement, who in that particular

line had no rival but Mrs. Abington. After this she was engaged at Drury Lane, and her theatrical career continued to be one of uninterrupted prosperity. She was not remarkable as the 'creator' of new parts; but in upwards of one hundred established characters she continued for nearly twenty years to delight a succession of enthusiastic audiences.

Even before she had arrived at the acme of her dramatic fame, as Mrs. Charles Mathews assures us, Miss Farren's domestic virtues, 'her fond attention to her mother, and affectionate devotion to her sister, together with her un-deviating personal propriety, proved no inconsiderable recommendation to public favour.' 'Petronius Arbiter' says that soon after Charles James Fox discontinued his visits, the Earl of Derby began to pay attentions to her, that he procured patrons for her amongst the fine ladies of his acquaintance, and used his influence with Sheridan to advance her consequence in the theatre. But this is not altogether correct. In a note by John Riddell to one of Horace Walpole's letters, we are assured that Miss Farren's first patronesses and acquaintances in London were Lady Ailesbury and the Hon. Mrs. Damer, who became such by the desire of the Duchess of Leinster, who knew something of her family in Ireland; and Riddell adds, 'it is not true that she was introduced to these ladies by Lord Derby (whom she did not then know), but just the reverse.' At what date she made Lord Derby's acquaintance does not appear; but it was probably about 1778 or 1779. In January of the latter year, Horace Walpole, writing to Sir Horace Mann, mentioned among other items of the gossip which he loved to retail that the Duke of Dorset was waiting for a Duchess till Lady Derby was divorced, adding—'He would not marry her before Lord Derby did, and now is forced to take her, when he himself has made her a very bad match.' But the divorce did not, for some reason not specified, ever take

place; and the Earl and Countess of Derby continued to live separate lives for the following twenty years. 'Petronius Arbiter' says that the earl, being in this awkward position, made Miss Farren an offer of *carte blanche*; and, as even the other biographer observes, had the attachment been pursued to the customary consequences of such connections, the world would have been more disposed to find excuses than to vent any very rigid censure on either of the parties. But Miss Farren rejected such a proposal with disdain; and Lord Derby was compelled to atone for the insult by the most humble behaviour. After her increasing prosperity had justified her in removing from her lodgings in Suffolk Street, near the Haymarket, to a house in Green Street, Grosvenor Square, Lord Derby is said to have been frequently seen following her, rather than walking with her, all the way from Old Drury to the West End, 'puffing from want of breath and sighing his soft tale, while she, from mere wantonness, has kept him on the jog-trot, and hardly deigned to give him a smile.' Mrs. Farren was her daughter's inseparable companion, and apparently the other daughter, Margaret, lived with them until her marriage to the actor, Knight, in 1788. Margaret was a competent actress, who, after appearing at Covent Garden on her wedding night as Bridget in *The Chapter of Accidents*, gave up her engagement in London and retired to Bath, where she remained a theatrical favourite until her death in 1804. How these three women, of poor birth, and no early education, managed to hold their own in fashionable society is a mystery; but there is no doubt that they did. In Horace Walpole's opinion, Elizabeth Farren was the first of all actresses; and in one of his letters to the Countess of Ossory in 1787, he gives what he believed to be the reason for it.

'Who should act genteel comedy perfectly but people of fashion who have sense? Actors and actresses can only guess at the tone

of high life, and *cannot* be inspired with it. Why are there so few genteel comedies but because most comedies are written by men not of that sphere? Etheridge, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Cibber wrote genteel comedy because they lived in the best company; and Mrs. Oldfield played it so well because she not only followed, but often set the fashion. General Burgoyne has written the best modern comedy, for the same reason; and Miss Farren is as excellent as Mrs. Oldfield because she has lived with the best style of men in England.'

In several of his later letters, he mentions having 'supped at Miss Farren's,' when the company he met would be sometimes of a theatrical, sometimes of an aristocratic cast. And one of his editors quotes Lord Berwick, a well-known diplomatist, as saying—

"Ah, those charming suppers! at the Bow Window House in Green Street, where I was admitted when I was a *very young* man, and where one used to meet General Conway, and Lady Ailesbury, Mrs. Damer, the old Duchess of Leinster, and the Ogilvies; General Burgoyne, Fitzpatrick, *your* father, and all the pleasantest people in London"; and then he generally ended with eulogies on her acting in *The Heiress*. "Ah! *that* game at chess, *that* game at chess. I shall never see anything like it again."

There is plenty of evidence that she was much caressed by fashionable society. When the Duke of Richmond instituted private theatricals in Privy Gardens, with the Hon. Mrs. Damer, Lord Henry Fitzgerald, Lord Derby, and other persons of quality as performers, Miss Farren was chosen to be director and manager of the stage business. It is said that it was on one of these occasions that the earl, in his quaint theatrical costume, and with his face painted and smeared for a dress rehearsal, at length made to Miss Farren a proposal of marriage. A bond is believed to have been drawn up, according to which she agreed to remain unmarried in the meantime, on condition that as soon as his present countess died he would marry her. However this may be,

from that time forward Miss Farren was generally regarded as the Countess of Derby elect. The writer of the *Testimony of Truth* tells us that 'the affection of Lord Derby for Miss Farren was that of a mind strongly imbued with a sense of honour, and deeply sensible of the virtues of its object. The assiduity of his lordship was flattering, and the circumstances in which he stood with relation to his countess were such as by no means to render any such attachment indecorous.' He usually escorted her to and from the theatre; or, if public or private business compelled his presence elsewhere, his son, Lord Stanley, appeared in his place. She was extremely discreet; she never went out anywhere unaccompanied by her mother; and we are assured that Lord Derby never had an interview with her in her own house at which the mother was not also present. Apparently, however, he did occasionally manage to snatch an uninterrupted interview elsewhere; for Miss Frances Williams Wynn, in her *Diaries of a Lady of Quality*, records that in her young days she often saw Miss Farren act the part of Lady Teazle in *The School for Scandal*, when—

'I recollect (*not* the admirable acting in the famous screen scene *but*) the circumstance of seeing Lord Derby leaving his private box to creep to her behind the scene; and, of course, we all looked with impatience for the discovery, hoping the screen would fall a little too soon, and show to the audience Lord Derby as well as Lady Teazle.'

For many years, according to 'Petronius Arbiter,' a servant was sent regularly at ten o'clock every morning from his lordship's house in Grosvenor Square to Miss Farren's in Green Street, to inquire after her health and whether she had slept well. Whether this be true or not, the earl was certainly most constant in his affection, and most assiduous in his attentions. An unwonted absence from divine service

one Sunday, for example, would cause him to drop into poetry in the following strain:—

‘TO MISS FARREN
ON HER BEING ABSENT FROM CHURCH.

‘While wond’ring Angels, as they look’d from high,
Observ’d thine Absence with an holy sigh,
To them a bright exalted Seraph said,
“Blame not the conduct of the absent maid !
Where e’er she goes, her steps can never stray,
Religion walks companion of her way :
She goes with ev’ry virtuous thought imprest,
Heav’n on her Face, and Heav’n within her Breast.”’

Miss Farren seldom acted out of London ; but we hear of her going on the northern circuit in the summer of 1787, by Colman’s permission, to play for the benefit of her sister Margaret. She then achieved the distinction of three rows of the pit laid into the boxes, and attracted so elegant an audience, and liked her reception so well, says Tate Wilkinson, that, with Colman’s permission, she engaged for a further week at York and ‘was attended with every respect, admiration, and attention she could expect, or her infinite merit deserve.’ She then treated the good Yorkshire folk to her impersonations of Lady Paragon, Lady Townley, Lady Teazle, Mrs. Oakley, Widow Belmour, and other ladies of fashion, as well as appearing as Miss Tittup in *Bon Ton* and other smaller parts. Two years later she made another summer tour, when, being patronised by the Prince of Wales, his pronounced partiality for her acting so influenced the public, that her receipts for a few nights approached those of Mrs. Siddons herself, the greatest theatrical favourite the country had ever known. For once the concurrent taste of the prince and the public may be unreservedly commended, for, of the superlative excellence of Miss Farren’s acting, there seem to have been scarcely two opinions. Boaden

speaks of her 'sparkling captivities'; Hazlitt of her 'fine-lady airs and graces,' of her 'elegant turn of her head and motion of her hand, and tripping of her tongue'; Cumberland of the 'exquisite style' in which she performed the part of Lady Paragon in his comedy of *The Natural Son*. Mrs. Charles Mathews says that so completely did she make the character of Lady Teazle her own, that notwithstanding the fact that she had transformed Sheridan's less refined heroine into the fine lady of her own time, her fascinating performance of it almost obliterated the remembrance of the original representation of the part. While George Colman remarks that 'no person has ever more successfully performed the elegant levities of Lady Townley upon the stage, or more happily practised the amiable virtues of Lady Grace in the highest circles of society.' Although her unexampled rise in her profession, and at the same time in fashionable society, begot a good deal of jealousy, and called forth some satire, no one ever made the slightest imputation on her virtue. And it must be remembered that the green-room of Drury Lane theatre in her time was stigmatised by Mrs. Siddons as a 'sink of iniquity.' Mrs. Inchbald used to say that to fix the degrees and shades of female virtue amongst the actresses of that time would have afforded employment for a very able casuist; à propos of which she would tell the following story:—

'One evening, about half an hour before the curtain was drawn up, some accident having happened in the dressing-room of one of the actresses, a woman of known intrigue, she ran in haste to the dressing-room of Mrs. Wells, to finish the business of her toilette. Mrs. Wells, who was the mistress of the well-known Major Topham, shocked at the intrusion of a reprobated woman who had a worse character than herself, quitted her own room and ran to Miss Farren's, crying—"What would Major Topham say if I were to remain in such company?" No sooner had she entered the room, to which as an asylum she had fled, than Miss

Farren flew out of the door, repeating—"What would Lord Derby say if I should be seen in such company?"

Lord Derby, however, as the poem already quoted shows, was of the opinion of the angels that 'her steps could never stray.' In fact, his confidence and constancy were such as to become a by-word among his friends. Horace Walpole, writing to Miss Berry in June 1791, casually remarks that his old enemy the east wind has been 'as constant as Lord Derby.' And three years later he wrote to the same correspondent that he and General Conway had been together to Miss Farren's house in Green Street, and there—

'besides her duenna-mother, found her at piquet with her unalterable Earl. Apropos, I have observed of late years, that when *Earls* take strong attachments, they are more steady than other men.'

Horace himself, it may be remarked in parenthesis, had recently become Earl of Orford, and in the last sentence was neatly intimating his own constancy to Miss Berry.

When Miss Mellon (afterwards Mrs. Coutts, and then Duchess of St. Albans) came to Drury Lane in 1795, she says that Miss Farren was then treated almost as though the aerial coronet was already on her brow. Lord Derby and other theatre-loving noblemen assembled round her in the great green-room, and she was generally considered as the glass of fashion and the mould of form. The 'great lady,' we are told, was extremely gracious to the rustic belle, though little divining that she also would one day be raised to the peerage. Lord Derby, as Miss Mellon's biographer informs us, was a singular-looking little man for a lover.

'Although at the time but forty-five [he was really only forty-three] he looked fifteen years older. He had an excessively large head surmounting his small spare figure, and wore his hair tied in a long, thin pigtail. This, with his attachment to short nankeen

gaiters, made him an easily recognised subject in the numerous caricatures of the day.'

But although Miss Farren was the pre-eminent comedy actress at Drury Lane, as well as a person of influence in the fashionable world outside, it is interesting to note that she could not, as some performers have since done, have it all her own way with the management. Like certain politicians of our own time, those who were managers in those days meant to manage,—and they did it. In 1796, as Mrs. Baron-Wilson tells us—

'The performance of *The Provoked Husband* was announced, Miss Farren to take her celebrated character of Lady Townley, in which her early success had been so great, that after her first appearance in it the *débutante* had been engaged at both the great theatres. From that time, however, it would seem that the changes in the lady's fortunes were more rapid than the changes in the wardrobe supplied by the management; and the future Countess, on examining the dress intended for her, refused to wear it. Both parties were resolute: the managers denied her a new dress, the actress rejected the old one; and the play was suddenly advertised to be withdrawn.'

But on the night when the play should have been acted there was a riot in the theatre, with loud calls for Miss Farren. Fortunately for her she was not there; and some sort of apology was made for her absence. But green-room gossip quickly spread in those days, and the habitués of the pit probably knew well enough all about the dispute. Anyway, they would not be quiet until a promise was made to produce *The Provoked Husband* on an early specified night. When that night arrived the theatre was crowded, everybody being anxious to see who had conquered in the green-room. But Miss Farren had been unable to stand out against the management when it was evidently backed up by the public, and she not only appeared in the despised old

satin dress, but was then compelled to make an apologetic curtsy to the angry audience before they would allow the play to go on.

At length, on the 15th of March 1797, the Countess of Derby died, after having been separated from her husband for nearly twenty years; and it was almost immediately announced that the earl was to marry Miss Farren. It was arranged that she should take formal leave of the stage on the 8th of April, and on that night the public flocked in such crowds to see their old favourite for the last time as Lady Teazle, that the theatre was packed full long before the play began. It was remarked that Miss Farren had never performed with greater animation or better spirits than on this occasion, until towards the close of the play, when it became evident that she was much affected. When she came to deliver Lady Teazle's valedictory address to Lady Sneerwell—

‘Let me also request, Lady Sneerwell, that you will make my respects to the scandalous college of which you are a member, and inform them that Lady Teazle, licentiate, begs leave to return the diploma they granted her, *as she leaves off practice, and kills characters no longer,*’

a faltering voice, and, after the utterance of the words italicised, a passionate burst of tears, showed that the actress was deeply moved by the application of the familiar sentence to her present situation. The sympathetic audience responded with a thundering burst of applause, and no more of *The School for Scandal* was listened to that night. The conclusion of the scene is thus described, and somewhat caustically commented on, by Boaden:—

‘Instead of the usual rhymes at the end of the play, the whole of the *dramatis personæ* remaining in their stations, Mr. Wroughton advanced and addressed to the audience the following personalities as to Miss Farren, for them to ratify if they approved them:—

“ But ah ! this night adieu the mournful mien,
 When Mirth’s loved favourite quits the mimic scene !
 [Looking towards Miss Farren, who stood supported by
 King and Miss Miller]
 Startled Thalia would assent refuse,
 But Truth and Virtue sued and won the Muse.”

I cannot but think this too strongly, however *truly*, put, the lady being herself present. He then spoke *her* acknowledgments, which she declined doing for herself, and then the Countess-elect advanced, and curtsied to the right, to the left, and to the front, as is usual upon occasions of high stage ceremonial.’

By this marriage, adds Boaden, the stage lost its only woman of fashion, for the only other eminent representative of stylish females, Miss Pope, had died a few weeks previously. From this date, according to the same critic, our comedy degenerated into farce.

‘The *lady* of our Congreves lost that court-like refinement in manners, that polished propriety in speech—the coarser parts in comedy were forced forward without a balance, without contrast—cultivated life, on the stage, became insipid as soon as its representative was without the necessary charms . . . and broad laughter reigned triumphant in the unbounded hilarity of Mrs. Jordan.’

On the 6th of May, within two months of the first countess’s death, the Earl of Derby and Miss Farren were married. There seems to have been some disappointment in the theatre when it was found that the countess did not make presents, on the occasion of her marriage, to all her old associates of the green-room. Many of these went about telling stories of her habitual parsimony, which—as generosity, even to lavishness, has always been a prominent characteristic of most actresses—no doubt appeared to them extremely reprehensible. Much sarcasm was vented when inquiries showed that the only persons in the theatre who had received any present on her retirement were her dresser, who had received nine shillings, being one week’s extra

pay, and the little call-boy, who had received a donation of half-a-crown. It must be admitted that Miss Farren seldom gave anything away; but at the same time it must not be forgotten that she always paid her just debts,—which some of the most generous of her sister actresses frequently omitted to do.

The best description of Miss Farren extant, as well as the best account of her powers as an actress, was contributed by 'an eminent critic' to the *Monthly Mirror* in 1797.

'Her figure [says this writer] is considerably above the middle height, and is of that slight texture which allows, and requires, the use of full and flowing drapery, an advantage of which she well knows how to avail herself; her face, though not regularly beautiful, is animated and prepossessing; her eye, which is blue and penetrating, is a powerful feature when she chooses to employ it on the public, and either flashes with spirit or melts with softness, as its mistress decides on the expression she wishes to convey; her voice we never thought to possess much sweetness, but it is refined and feminine; and her smiles, of which she is no niggard, fascinate the heart as much as her form delights the eye.'

She was not faultless; but her merits were transcendent, her failings comparatively trivial. Her chief failure was in her sentiment, which this writer holds to have been as artificial, formal, and affected, as her comedy was easy and natural,—though he is bound to admit that her serious were no less popular with the public than her sportive performances. But in the path of elegant comedy she had no superior; 'and if we are to depend on the scanty records of the British stage, it will be difficult to say whether she ever had an equal.' He places her above Mrs. Abington (as also did Horace Walpole), and on a level with Mrs. Oldfield, so far as we can gather what that lady was like from the account of Colley Cibber.

'She possesses ease, vivacity, spirit, and humour: and her performances are so little injured by effort that we have often

experienced a delusion of the senses, and imagined, what in the theatre it is so difficult to imagine, the scene of action to be identified, and Miss Farren really the character which she was only attempting to sustain.'

He does not believe, he says, that St. James's ever displayed superior evidence of fine breeding than Miss Farren has often done in her own person, and he shrewdly suspects that 'she will carry more of polished life *into* the drawing-room, than many ladies of quality, after an attendance of many years, have made shift to bring out of it.' His belief appears to have been fully justified. When presented at Court soon after her marriage, Lady Derby was noticed with special regard by the precise and fastidious Queen Charlotte, who allowed her to take a place in the marriage procession of the Princess Royal. And the strolling-player's child, who had passed twenty-three of her years on the stage, remained for thirty-two years more no inconspicuous ornament to the aristocratic society into which she had married.

MARY ROBINSON ('PERDITA')

THE beautiful pictures of Mrs. Robinson by Reynolds and Romney, and the intimate association of her name with the Shakespearean character in which she was most popular,—that of Perdita, the charming 'queen of curds and cream' of *The Winter's Tale*,—together with a vague remembrance that she was cheated and deserted by that very unShakespearean and unchivalrous Prince Florizel who afterwards became George IV., have invested her memory with a halo of romance, which unfortunately becomes considerably dissipated after a calm and dispassionate scrutiny. The present writer has discovered nothing in this connection (or for that matter in any other) to induce him to bear a hand in the recent endeavour to whitewash the character of that Brummagem 'Florizel' who prided himself on being 'the first gentleman in Europe'; but he has nevertheless been forced to the conclusion that the modern 'Perdita' was by no means the sweet little innocent poetical thing which she and some of her admirers have pictured for our admiration and pity. In the last year of her life she wrote an autobiography (stopping short, however, at the date of her *liaison* with the Prince of Wales), which, on her death-bed, she exacted from her daughter a solemn promise to publish; and which duly appeared, with a continuation by that daughter, in 1801. This *Memoir* was reprinted some ten or twelve years ago, under the editorship of Mr. J. Fitzgerald Molloy, whose Introduction and notes give no hint that any part of the narrative needs to be taken *cum grano salis*. In fact, it has

been generally accepted as carrying on the face of it, as Huish declared in his *Memoirs of George IV.*, 'indubitable evidence of its veracity.' But, apart from the fact that a considerable discount would need to be made from any *ex parte* statement made by a woman pleading at the bar of public opinion in defence of her own reputation, the narrative contains so many contradictions and improbabilities, and gives a representation of the writer's conduct and character so irreconcilable with what is otherwise known and reported of her, that we may well have a shrewd suspicion that Mrs. Robinson, who had by this time become a practised novelist, presented the world with an autobiography which, to a very large extent, was a work of fiction. In spite of contradictions and discrepancies, however, some of which will be evident enough as we proceed, we must, in the main, in the absence of any better authority, depend on her own version of her story.

The shepherdess Perdita in the play turns out to be a princess in disguise. Mrs. Perdita Robinson did not go so far as that; but she claimed to be related to Benjamin Franklin, on her father's side, and to be a collateral descendant of the illustrious John Locke, on the side of her mother. Her father, she tells us, came of a respectable family in Ireland, the original name of which was MacDermot,—a name which, on getting an additional estate, her grandfather changed to Darby. Her mother was the grandchild of Catherine Seys, one of the daughters and co-heirs of Richard Seys, Esq. of Boverton Castle in Glamorganshire. Physically, intellectually, and morally, we are given to understand, her family was an exceptionally fine one. Her grandmother and great-grandmother were specially noteworthy for their great piety, virtue, and benevolence. Her grandmother was also remarkably handsome; and her mother, although not handsome, had a peculiarly neat figure and a vivacity of manner

which gained her many suitors. It would probably have been better for her if she had chosen any one of the crowd in preference to Mr. Darby. At first, however, all went as merry as the marriage bell. Mr. Darby prospered exceedingly as captain of a Bristol whaler, and brought up his young family in luxury and happiness. Mary was born in what she, perhaps too magniloquently, describes as a 'venerable mansion,' adjoining the cathedral church in Bristol. She informs the reader, rather in the style of Shakespeare's Owen Glendower, that—

'in this awe-inspiring habitation, which I shall henceforth denominate the Minster House, during a tempestuous night, on the 27th of November 1758, I first opened my eyes to this world of duplicity and sorrow. I have often heard my mother say that a more stormy hour she never remembered. The wind whistled round the dark pinnacles of the minster tower, and the rain beat in torrents against the casements of her chamber. Through life the tempest has followed my footsteps, and I have in vain looked for a short interval of repose from the perseverance of sorrow.'

Her brothers and sisters were uncommonly handsome in their infancy; but she was swarthy, with a small round face, disproportionately large eyes, and a melancholy expression. That expression correctly indicated her temperament; for, as soon as she could read, her greatest delight was to learn the epitaphs and monumental inscriptions in the churchyard; and before she was seven she could repeat Pope's 'Lines to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady,' Mason's 'Elegy on the Death of the beautiful Countess of Coventry,' and other poems of an equally exhilarating character; while the only melodies that ever pleased her were those of a mournful kind. She was sent to the school kept by Hannah More's sisters; where, amongst her school-fellows were two daughters of Powell the actor, and the young lady who afterwards became Mrs. John Kemble. When she was about seven years of age, her father set out

for America, with the intention of staying there two years, while he established a Whale Fishery on the coast of Labrador, a project which included the civilising of the Esquimaux and the employment of a large number of them. Darby left his wife and children handsomely housed and provided for in Bristol; but, as his daughter puts it, he became 'the slave of a young and artful woman who had availed herself of his American solitude to undermine his affections for his wife and the felicity of his family.' Other misfortunes followed. The Indians rose in a body, burned Darby's settlement, killed some of his people, and threw his produce into the sea. Then he had other losses, which induced him to give a bill of sale on the whole of his property in England, with the result that before long his wife and children were turned out of house and home. Then, after three years' absence, he suddenly appeared in England, and wrote requiring his wife and children to meet him in London. They went; and were told that he had determined to place Mary and her brother at a school in Chelsea, that he should return almost immediately to America, and that he would arrange to pay for his wife's board in any respectable family she might choose to live with in London. Mrs. Darby had to be content to take up her quarters in a clergyman's house in the neighbourhood, while Mary was sent to a school kept by a lady with the awe-inspiring name of Meribah Larrington; a most accomplished female, we are told, whose father had given her a 'masculine education.' Mrs. Robinson assures us that her schoolmistress was not only a good Latin, French, and Italian scholar, but 'a perfect arithmetician and astronomer,' who also possessed the art of painting on silk to a degree of exquisite perfection. But—an indispensable part of an eighteenth-century masculine education, we must remember—she drank! However, when not intoxicated, she instructed Mary who was her

favourite pupil, not only in the aforementioned accomplishments, but also in domestic economy. Unfortunately, the father who had given Mrs. Larrington so curious an education lived on the premises; for, not only was he, we are informed, of the Anabaptist persuasion, and so stern in his conversation that the pupils lived in perpetual terror of him; but notwithstanding a highly picturesque appearance, including a silvery beard, which reached to his breast, and a kind of Persian robe, which gave him the appearance of a necromancer, his manners were 'singularly disgusting.' Mary stayed fourteen months at this school, going to the clergyman's on Sundays to take tea with her mother; and on one such occasion, in her fourteenth year, she received an offer of marriage from a naval officer who had known her father, and who took her to be of the quite mature age of sixteen. When 'pecuniary derangements' forced Mrs. Larrington to give up school, Mary was removed to a boarding-school at Battersea,—then an outlying country village; but after several months had passed without any remittance from America, Mrs. Darby opened a ladies' boarding-school in Chelsea on her own account, and took her daughter from Battersea to assist her. Eight months later, Mr. Darby paid another flying visit to England, broke up his wife's school, which he considered a public disgrace to his name, placed Mary at a 'finishing school' at Marylebone, and (presumably) established Mrs. Darby in another clergyman's family in that neighbourhood. Before leaving for America again he is reported to have said to his wife: 'Take care that no dishonour falls upon my daughter. If she is not safe at my return, I will annihilate you!' There never was such a father, out of a transpontine melodrama.

Mary had now reached the age of fifteen, and felt sure she might attain fame and fortune on the stage. The dancing-master at her school happened to be also ballet-master at

Covent Garden Theatre, and through him she was introduced to Hull, the deputy-manager, who was so pleased with her recitation that he procured her introductions to Murphy and to Garrick. The latter was so taken with her that he arranged for her to play Cordelia to his own Lear; encouraged her to frequent the theatre as much as possible in the meantime, and personally superintended her rehearsals. Then she attracted notice of another kind. A strange officer followed her continually to and from the theatre, and, after a while, wrote to her mother, avowing himself the son of Lady——, and offering the young lady marriage. The mother had all but consented to what seemed so desirable a match, when some friend informed her that the lover was already married to a lady whom he had left in Ireland. Then there came another offer of marriage, from a man of splendid fortune; but as he happened to be old enough to be her grandfather, she not unnaturally declined the honour. At length an apparently eligible young man appeared on the scene. Opposite to the house in which Mrs. Darby lived was the office of an eminent firm of solicitors; and the young lady frequently found one of their articled clerks observing her from his windows 'with evident emotion.' The name of this young man was Robinson; and he very soon contrived to obtain an introduction from a friend, who expatiated on his good qualities, his expectations both from his profession and from a rich old uncle, and his enthusiastic admiration for Miss Darby. Robinson paid court to the mother by presenting her with elegantly-bound copies of Hervey's *Meditations Among the Tombs*, and similar lugubrious works, of which he found she was fond; and is said to have made more progress in her affections than in those of her daughter. After a short courtship it was arranged that the young people should be married at once, Robinson to live for a time at the house of

his mother-in-law, and the marriage to be kept a secret until he had completed his articles and attained his majority. Mrs. Robinson labours to show that this was no marriage of affection on her part. She was too young, she says: only three months before she became a wife she had dressed a doll; she still wore a child's frocks, and even two years after her marriage was so juvenile that she was always accosted as 'Miss' by strangers or in the shops. She would far rather have gone on the stage; but she yielded, she declares, to her mother's entreaties, who was haunted by her husband's threat of annihilation, and feared the results of a theatrical career. Mrs. Robinson and her mother removed to a large old-fashioned house in Great Queen Street, but after a short honeymoon Robinson returned to his chambers. After a time Mrs. Darby became suspicious. She then discovered that Robinson was not the son and heir, but the illegitimate son, of the rich old gentleman from whom he said he had expectations. She therefore insisted on an acknowledgment of the marriage; and, after some pressure, Robinson agreed to take them both to the home of his uncle in Wales.

Throughout her autobiography Mrs. Robinson protests a good deal. We are told that the world has mistaken the character of her mind. 'I have ever been the reverse of volatile and dissipated,' she declares; and in this early part of her married life she assures us that her favourite occupation was to visit Westminster Abbey, in company with a like-minded friend, to meditate among the tombs. Moreover—

'I had now been married four months; and though love was not the basis of my fidelity, honour and a refined sense of feminine rectitude attached me to the interest as well as to the person of my husband. I considered chastity as the brightest ornament that could embellish the female mind.'

Mrs. Robinson, when writing all this at the age of forty-three, and after a considerable practical experience of the contrary, may possibly have been impressed by the theoretical soundness of some of her copy-book maxims of morality; but Mrs. Robinson, in her seventeenth year, was evidently much more given to thinking what were the brightest ornaments of the female body. In fact, to the last, she seems to have been able to remember what she wore on every occasion in her whole life. When she first met Robinson at Greenwich, she tells us, 'It was then the fashion to wear silks. I remember that I wore a night gown of pale blue lustring, with a chip hat trimmed with ribands of the same colour. Never was I dressed so perfectly to my own satisfaction.' And when Robinson introduced her to his father, or his uncle, or whoever Mr. Harris was, she was evidently thinking much less about her morals and mental accomplishments than about 'a dark claret-coloured riding-habit, with a white beaver hat and feathers.' And she wishes us to understand that such tasteful trappings were not without their effect, for, she says, the old gentleman embraced her with excessive cordiality, and even declared that if she had not already married Tom, he would have liked her as a wife for himself. But although Mr. Harris was himself so cordial, there was a daughter, named Betsy, and a housekeeper, named Molly, who were cold from the first, and before she left, even insolent. Miss Harris, it appears, rode on horseback in a camlet safeguard, with a high-crowned bonnet; whereas, 'I wore a fashionable habit, and looked like something human.' Perhaps she made comparisons, which that copy-book of hers might have reminded her were odious. At any rate, both Betsy and Molly said a lawyer's wife had no right to dress like a duchess. It may be that they knew more than she yet did about Tom's income and expectations. She

evidently did not discover what was her husband's real relationship to Mr. Harris; and the old gentleman, though he talked very pleasantly, gave them no money. Nevertheless, immediately after their return to London, they took a recently-built house in Hatton Garden, furnished it with 'peculiar elegance,' set up a phaeton and saddle horses, and Mary made her *début*, as she phrases it, 'in the broad hemisphere of fashionable folly.' We now hear no more about Westminster Abbey and meditations among the tombs: it is all Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and the Pantheon. And from time to time she favours us with particulars of her costumes of 'peculiar but simple elegance.'

'The first time I went to Ranelagh [she writes] my habit was so singularly plain and Quaker-like that all eyes were fixed upon me. I wore a gown of light brown lustring with close round cuffs (it was then the fashion to wear long ruffles); my hair was without powder, and my head adorned with a plain round cap and a white chip hat, without any ornaments whatever.'

Another place of polite entertainment to which her husband took her was the Pantheon, where the gay and the fashionable congregated to admire and be admired. Large hoops and high feathers were then worn; and we may presume that she wore these aids to beauty, as well as a habit of pale pink satin, trimmed with broad sable, and a suit of rich and valuable point lace, which had been a birthday gift from her father to her mother. Amongst all the beautiful women there, she thought the loveliest form to be that of Lady Almeida Carpenter, and the most pleasing countenance that of Mrs. Baddeley, though the Marchioness Townshend created the greatest buzz of admiration as she moved about the room. But even amongst such competitors as these, she very soon heard people on every side asking, 'Who is the young lady in the pink dress trimmed with sable?' According to her account (though there is another version, as we

shall see later on), Lord Northington, son of the late Chancellor (whom she claims for a godfather), came up to her and made himself known. He then introduced a number of his friends, including such rakes as Lord Lyttelton,—who, before his tragic death at the early age of thirty-five, had well earned the title of 'the wicked Lord Lyttelton,'—and Captain Ayscough, a parasite of Lyttelton's, and one of the most conspicuous 'fools of fashion.' Lyttelton at once began to cultivate Robinson's society with the view of undermining the honour of his wife. His method, she tells us, was to present her with Mrs. Barbauld's poems and similar moral productions, while at the same time he enticed her husband into all sorts of profligacy, and involved him in hopeless debt. Lyttelton, Ayscough, 'Fighting' Fitzgerald, and other rakes about town, made improper advances to her; but she succeeded, she assures us, in repulsing them all. Fitzgerald, however, once nearly succeeded in carrying her off in a coach-and-four, when he was provided with armed servants, and pistols in the carriage in case of pursuit; and Lyttelton settled down to the slower, but, as he thought, surer method of completing the husband's ruin by drawing him into further expensive pleasures, luring him on with hopes of some lucrative post which should be obtained for him.

The reader is apt to ask, Where did the money come from to pay for all this splendour and riotous living? Mrs. Robinson says that she frequently inquired into the extent of her husband's finances, and that he as often assured her that they were in every respect competent to his expenses. She observed that he had frequent visitors of the Jewish tribe, with whom he was often closeted; but when she questioned him about this, he told her these persons came upon law business, and requested her not to meddle with his professional occupations. Seeing that in another place she distinctly informs us that Robinson could not practise as a

solicitor, because he had never completed his articles, one would like to know what his professional occupations were. And perhaps we may accept an account which comes from another source. A few years later, Mrs. Robinson was the subject of numerous pamphlets and newspaper paragraphs. Some of these were mere catchpenny publications, such as the poetical epistles from Florizel to Perdita, or the pretended copies of the letters which passed between Mrs. Robinson and the Prince of Wales under these signatures; some merely scandalous pieces of ribaldry, written without any real knowledge, and appealing only to the pruriency of the public. But in 1781, when she was in her altitude, and one of the most conspicuous figures in Bond Street or the Park, there appeared a quarto volume of forty-three pages, published at two shillings, which purports to contain copies of real letters which passed between Mrs. Robinson and 'a certain Israelite,' between the 21st September and the 30th November 1773. These letters of hers are all dated from Bristol, and addressed to the young Jew in London. In one of them, dated the 9th of November, she says that on the previous Tuesday Mr. Robinson set out for Carmarthenshire, where he intends staying a week, and that he intends sending for her to stay a few days there. All this, if only these letters bore the date of 1774 instead of 1773, would well fit in with her own account of her visit to Mr. Harris in Carmarthenshire, when, as she tells us, her mother and herself were left at Bristol while Robinson went on first to pave the way for her reception. And as ladies have never been famous for putting any year of our era on their letters, it is certainly no very extravagant supposition to make that she never put on these more than the day of the month, and that their editor predated them by one year. At any rate, the said editor shows in his scathing 'Introduction' that he knew a great deal more about both

Mr. and Mrs. Robinson's family and affairs than was likely to be known by any mere stranger. Briefly summarised, his account of them is as follows. Robinson, while a clerk to Vernon and Elderton, attorneys, represented himself to the Darbys as the nephew of Mr. Harris of Carmarthenshire, 'a gentleman of £30,000,' to whom he was sole heir, and who at the moment allowed him £500 a year. The young lady, as well as her mother, jumped at the match; but, after the marriage, discovered that he was the illegitimate son of a laundress and a tailor of York Buildings. However, as there was then no help for it, the young woman thought the way to make the best of a bad bargain was to set her wits to work in helping her husband to 'jew' the Jews. Of course, in order to do this to the best advantage, it would be well to keep up the story of the rich uncle in Wales; and in this case we have to take the whole account of Mr. Harris and his household in the autobiography as so much fiction. They somehow managed, we are told, to borrow £1000 from a money-lender on a bill of sale and the security of his manufactured reversionary interests; and it was her ingenuity which devised the stratagems and deceptions by which tradesmen were induced to furnish the handsome house in Hatton Garden—and so unwittingly provide them with fresh security on which to borrow more money. Robinson then assumed the character of a merchant; and, in conjunction with a dreadful set of colleagues, found means to obtain large quantities of goods on credit on the strength of foreign letters which their confederates transmitted to them from Holland, Ostend, and France. The account which we get from this source of the intimacy with Lords Northington and Lyttelton differs materially from hers.

'At every fashionable place of resort they appeared as brilliant as any in the circle; the extravagance of the diversions was no check to their vanity. At a masquerade one evening, she was

noticed by Lord Lyttleton, Lord Valencia, and Lord Northington. Her pride was highly gratified to be distinguished by three such fashionable noblemen; and that an acquaintance so fortunately begun should not be lost, she wrote the following note to each gentleman the next day: "MY LORD,—A Lady in the character of an orange-girl that had the honour of being distinguished by your Lordship last night at the masquerade, was a Mrs. R——, of Hatton Garden, who will esteem herself further honoured if your Lordship should condescend to favour her with a visit." On this singular invitation the gentlemen came, and paid their respective addresses to her; but it was the intrepid, persevering Lord Lyttleton that most succeeded; it was the splendour of his equipage that seduced her vain heart, till at length his familiarity with her became the topic of the whole town. They were continually together at every place of amusement; and the husband trudged after them, as stupid and as tranquil as any brute of the cornuted creation.'

After a short time, it was whispered in Lord Lyttleton's ear that his new associate, instead of being the son of a gentleman of fortune, was only the progeny of a tailor, and, either not liking the association, or not caring to be bled so profusely any longer, he suddenly dropped them, having paid dearly enough for his short acquaintance. The Robinsons then took refuge in the Fleet; and on their liberation fifteen months later by an Insolvent Act, they subsisted by his borrowing money whenever he could from his wife's admirers.

The letters which follow after this unflattering biography are by no means of a romantic character. In a postscript to the Israelite's answer to her epistle of 7th October, he says, without comment or explanation, that he encloses £50. A week later, she writes to him: 'How can I love that stupid thing, R——? Yet I am his, Fortune has made it so; but I cannot think I am bound to abide strictly by an engagement that I was trepanned into.' A postscript to her letter of 23rd October says: 'As I am rather short, the sooner you oblige

me the greater the favour.' On 1st November, he concludes a long letter with the words: 'You little prodigal! You have spent £200 in six weeks. I will not answer your drafts.' On November 9, she writes: 'Since I wrote my last letter, I received one from my dear Mr. R—— [whom she has already reported to be in Wales] wherein he desires me to inform you that if you please to answer my drafts, he shall not want his till he returns to London; the money, I can assure you, is for me.' But the young Israelite was getting tired of it; for on 23rd November she writes:—

'I find you have not yet answered my draft. I do not wish an acquaintance with any man who professes so much love, but who gives so little proof of it. I wish I could recall those imprudent moments when I suffered your deluding promises and seductive tongue to betray me into sin; but unless you give me the token of your sincerity that I ask for, I shall take care how I trust you again. I am astonished that you should scruple to lend me such a sum as £100 when it was the last I should borrow, and should have repaid it faithfully. Now you have an opportunity of showing your love, or I shall see that you have all along deceived me.'

To which the answer is a long letter on the evils of avarice; and the correspondence ends. There is no positive proof of the authenticity of these letters. But Mrs. Robinson herself admits in her autobiography that while waiting at Bristol for her husband to send for her from Wales, she, at his request, wrote to a money-lender in Goodman's Fields, whom *she* knew, for a sum of money that would be necessary for the journey; adding inconsistently—'I was an entire stranger to the transaction which rendered him the temporary source of my husband's finances.' The letters themselves are by no means inconsistent with what we can gather of Mrs. Robinson's character and conduct from sources less suspicious, perhaps, than her own autobiography. They afford, in conjunction

with what was probably the young Israelite's own 'Introduction' thereto, the only explanation that has ever been offered of how this young lawyer's clerk and his beautiful but penniless wife obtained the money for their handsome house, furnished with 'peculiar elegance,' for their carriage and saddle horses, for Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and all the rest of it. And they were never disavowed or contradicted.

Mrs. Robinson's own account of the collapse of the Hatton Garden establishment contains a number of other particulars, and endeavours to throw all the responsibility for it on to the shoulders of her husband by the assertion that he had, previous to their union, deeply involved himself in a bond debt of considerable magnitude. She tells us that they had an execution in the house; and that, after remaining for a short time at Finchley, in a house kindly lent them by a friend, Robinson, in fear of arrest if he stayed any longer near London, carried her off on another visit to his 'uncle' in Wales. The second visit is represented as by no means so successful as the first. Not only did Miss Harris scarcely bid them welcome, and Molly exhibit her insulting displeasure; but even Mr. Harris himself greeted them with such questions as—'How long do you think I will support you?' and 'What business have beggars to marry?' His manor house was yet unfinished; and he informed her that he had no accommodation there for her approaching confinement. She was consequently compelled to take up her residence for that purpose in an old mansion, a mile and a half distant, part of which had been converted into a flannel manufactory. The young wife was naturally indignant, and freely expresses her disgust at finding that she had allied herself with a family who had neither sentiment nor sensibility, '*whose loftiest branch was as inferior to my stock as the small weed is beneath the loftiest tree that overshades it.*' Three weeks

after her daughter was born, they went on to Abergavenny; then to Monmouth, where they stayed a month with her grandmother; and then returned to London. Of course they immediately began visiting Ranelagh and Vauxhall, where they again met Lyttelton, Ayscough, Fitzgerald, and other dissipated men about town; but after a very short time Robinson was arrested for debts amounting, she says, to £1200, and lodged in the King's Bench Prison. It is certainly to her credit that she went into the King's Bench with her husband, and remained there with him during the whole period of his incarceration, in spite of the numerous offers which she alleged to have been made by Lyttelton and others to 'protect' her. According to Miss Hawkins, who says she had the story on very good authority, Robinson had a guinea a week allowed him by his father, and was offered employment in writing, which latter the worthless rascal would not accept. But the conduct of Mrs. Robinson, who at that time was only seventeen, was eminently meritorious; 'she had her child to attend to, she did all the work of their apartments, she even scoured the stairs, and she accepted the writing and earned the pay which he had refused.' She also found time to write a quarto poem of some length, entitled *Captivity*, which was published under the patronage of Georgiana, the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire,—unfortunately with no great pecuniary result.

As soon as they escaped from prison, however, the old life was resumed, and the very first place they went to was Vauxhall. But as Robinson could not practise as a lawyer because he had not completed his articles, while his father refused further supplies, the pressing problem was, as she phrases it, 'how were we to subsist honourably and above reproach.' Her thoughts turned once more to the possibilities of the stage. Brereton introduced them to Sheridan (who had just

acquired a share in Drury Lane Theatre), and he, after hearing her recite some passages of Shakespeare, gave her an engagement. Garrick, though retired from the stage, undertook to be her tutor; and on 10th December 1776 she made her first appearance, in the character of Juliet. Genest, in his *Annals of the Stage*, says she was received with great applause. Nobody has ever called her a great actress; but she played certain parts with a winning gracefulness, and the public were bewitched by the beauty of her face and figure,—especially when she took the parts of male characters. On the stage, as elsewhere, she devoted much attention to her dress. In fact, all that she tells us of her representation of Juliet is that her dress was a pale pink satin, trimmed with crape, richly spangled with silver, and her head ornamented with white feathers; and so forth. When, a few weeks later, she played the part of Statira in Lee's *Alexander the Great*, there is more excuse for a detailed description of her costume; for, in defiance of the fashion which then prescribed hoops and powder for every female character, of whatever nationality or period, she wore neither, but appeared in a white and blue costume after the Persian fashion, with her feet in richly ornamented sandals; which, as she truly says, was both picturesque and characteristic, and in which she received 'the most flattering approbation.' In the following February she appeared as Amanda in Sheridan's *Trip to Scarborough*, when something happened which nearly frightened her out of her wits. The audience had supposed the play to be an entirely new piece; and when they found that it was only an alteration of Vanbrugh's *Relapse*, there was a disturbance.

'I was terrified beyond imagination when Mrs. Yates, no longer able to bear the hissing of the audience, quitted the scene, and left me alone to encounter the critic tempest. I stood for some moments as if I had been petrified. Mr. Sheridan, from the side

wing, desired me not to quit the boards; the late Duke of Cumberland, from the stage box, bade me take courage: "It is not *you*, but the play they hiss," said his Royal Highness. I curtsied; and that curtsey seemed to electrify the whole house, for a thundering peal of encouraging applause followed. The comedy was suffered to go on, and is to this hour a stock play at Drury Lane Theatre.'

Having a handsome salary, and the unstinted applause of the public, Mrs. Robinson now 'looked forward with delight both to celebrity and fortune.' She had numbers of the sort of offers which a beautiful woman in her position in those days was seldom without; and she declares that if she were to mention the names of all those who held forth the temptations of fortune to her at that time, she would create a good deal of consternation in many families of the fashionable world. The only name she does mention is that of the Duke of Rutland, who proposed to make a settlement of £600 a year on her if she would leave her husband. But although Robinson not only persistently neglected her, but spent much of her earnings on other women, she had still 'the consolation of an unsullied name.' Sheridan paid her a great deal of attention; and she had a great admiration for him. She again and again contrasts his 'flattering and zealous attentions' with the marked and increasing neglect of her husband; and urges (as though there had been some suggestion of impropriety) that, situated as she was, it was difficult to avoid his society, seeing that he was manager of the theatre.

'He continued to visit me frequently, and always gave me the most friendly counsel. He knew that I was not properly protected by Mr. Robinson, but he was too generous to build his gratification on the detraction of another. The happiest moments I then knew were passed in the society of this distinguished being.'

Her popularity increased every night; and on the

strength of increasing fame and fortune she launched out into great expense; hiring a house situated between the Hummums and the Bedford Arms in Covent Garden, keeping a phaeton, horses, and ponies, and having her morning levees so crowded that she could scarcely find a quiet hour for study. She was also able to boast that 'my fashions in dress were followed with flattering avidity.' Robinson's creditors, however (it is always *his* creditors), became so clamorous that the whole of the receipts from her benefits had to be handed over to them. About this time she says that she paid another visit to Mr. Harris in Wales; when Mrs. Robinson the famous actress found herself on a very different footing from Mrs. Robinson the unfortunate wife in want of a temporary asylum. She was gazed at and examined with the greatest curiosity, and consulted as the very oracle of fashion. On her return to London, the Duke of Rutland renewed his solicitations; and amongst others, she enumerates similar proposals from a *Royal Duke*, a *lofty* marquis, and a city merchant of considerable fortune, who addressed her 'through the medium of milliners, mantua-makers, etc.' These she scorned: but a proposal was on the point of being made which she did accept.

George III. and Queen Caroline, with their family, frequently attended the theatre; and although, as we know, the king occasionally vented his eccentric opinion that Shakespeare was 'sad stuff,' he commanded *The Winter's Tale* for the 3rd of December 1778. Mrs. Robinson had often played Perdita before, but she had never yet performed before the royal family, and was rather nervous. But in the green-room, before she went on, 'Gentleman' Smith (who took the part of Leontes in the play), laughingly exclaimed—'By Jove, Mrs. Robinson, you will make a conquest of the Prince; for to-night you look handsomer

than ever.' While waiting to go on the stage, she stood in the wing opposite the royal box, in conversation with Lord Malden, and noticed that the Prince was watching them all the time. Of course she does not say so, but it is pretty evident between the lines of her own account of the matter that she likewise made eyes at him. This is what happened when she went on:—

'I hurried through the first scene, not without much embarrassment, owing to the fixed attention with which the Prince of Wales honoured me. Indeed some flattering remarks which were made by his Royal Highness met my ear as I stood near his box, and I was overwhelmed with confusion. The Prince's particular attention was observed by every one, and I was again rallied at the end of the play. On the last curtsey, the Royal family condescendingly returned a bow to the performers; but just as the curtain was falling, my eyes met those of the Prince of Wales; and with a look that I *never shall forget*, he gently inclined his head a second time; I felt the compliment, and blushed my gratitude.'

Two or three days after this, Lord Malden (afterwards Earl of Essex) called at her house, and with some apparent hesitation and embarrassment, delivered a letter addressed 'to Perdita,' which he informed her was from the Prince of Wales. 'It contained only a few words, but those expressive of more than common civility,' and it was signed 'Florizel.' She gave a formal and doubtful answer, because she professed to have some doubt whether the letter really came from the Prince. Two days later, Lord Malden brought a second letter, and a message to the effect that if she continued sceptical, she was to go to the Oratorio, and he would by some signal convince her that he was the writer of the letters. She went; and when she had taken her seat in the balcony box, the Prince immediately began making signs to her.

'He held the printed bill before his face, and drew his hand across his forehead, still fixing his eyes on me. I was confused

and knew not what to do. My husband was with me, and I was fearful of his observing what passed. Still the Prince continued to make signs, such as moving his hand on the edge of the box as if writing, then speaking to the Duke of York (then Bishop of Osnaburg), who also looked towards me with particular attention. I now observed one of the gentlemen in waiting bring the Prince a glass of water; before he raised it to his lips he looked at me.'

If all this went on as she describes, it is by no means surprising that many of the audience observed it, and that the people in the pit directed their gaze at the place where she sat. Robinson seems to have had a most accommodating attack of temporary blindness. On the following day, she informs us, one of the 'diurnal prints' observed that there was one passage in Dryden's Ode which seemed particularly interesting to the Prince of Wales, who—

'Gazed on the fair
Who caused his care,
And sigh'd, and look'd, and sigh'd again.'

But she conveniently omits to mention that another of the 'diurnal prints' gave the following rather different account of the whole matter:—

'A circumstance of rather an embarrassing nature happened at last night's Oratorio. Mrs. R——, decked out in all her finery, took care to post herself in one of the upper boxes, immediately opposite the Prince's, and by those airs peculiar to herself, contrived at last so to *basilisk* a certain heir-apparent that his fixed attention to the beautiful object above became generally noticed, and soon after astonished their Majesties, who, not being able to discover the cause, seemed at a loss to account for the extraordinary effect. No sooner, however, were they properly informed, than a messenger was instantly sent aloft desiring the dart-dealing actress to withdraw, which she complied with, though not without expressing the utmost chagrin at her mortifying removal.'

'Florizel's' letters now came almost daily; and she answered them as 'Perdita.' She says there was 'a beautiful

ingenuousness in his language, a warm and enthusiastic adoration, expressed in every letter,' which interested and charmed her. He sent her his portrait in miniature, accompanied by a small heart cut in paper, on one side of which he had written *Je ne change qu'en mourant*, and on the other, *Unalterable to my Perdita through life*. Of course he pressed for an interview; which for some time she declined; and during the whole spring, while this correspondence lasted, she gave the Prince, we are assured, the best advice in her power. She recommended him to be patient till he should become his own master; not to do anything prematurely that would incur the displeasure of the King; to wait till he knew more of her mind and manners before he engaged in a public attachment to her; and she also reminded him that if she consented to quit her husband, she would be thrown entirely on his mercy; pictured the temptations to which beauty would expose him; and what she would suffer if he should ever change in his sentiments towards her. In this account of the Florizel and Perdita correspondence, Mrs. Robinson clearly wishes to convey the impression that, although a neglected and almost deserted wife, it took a great deal to seduce her from the path of virtue. But it is equally susceptible of the interpretation that by an affected coyness and reluctance she was really stimulating the ardour of her pursuer; while her diplomatic references to the position she would be placed in in the event of a change in his sentiments (which not only drew by way of answer repeated assurances of lasting affection, but also a bond, payable on the Prince's coming of age, for £20,000) show that Perdita, notwithstanding her assertion that she knew as little of the world's deceptions as if she had been educated in the deserts of Siberia, was really gifted with a shrewdness far beyond her years. The Prince became more and more eager for an

interview, and suggested that she should come to his apartments disguised in male attire. But this she most decidedly refused to do; and the refusal, as Lord Malden reported, threw him into the most distressing agitation. Then Lord Malden complicated matters by lamenting that he had ever become their go-between, and declaring that he was himself consumed with a violent passion for her, which, in these circumstances, made him the most miserable of men. After this, we are told some more details of her husband's neglect and infidelities; and then the autobiography breaks off with the following passage:—

‘His indifference naturally produced an alienation of esteem on my side, and the increasing adoration of the most enchanting of mortals hourly reconciled my mind to the idea of a separation. The unbounded assurances of lasting affection which I received from his Royal Highness in many scores of the most eloquent letters, the contempt which I experienced from my husband, and the perpetual labour which I underwent for his support, at length began to weary out my fortitude. Still I was reluctant to become the theme of public animadversion, and still I remonstrated with my husband on the unkindness of his conduct.’

The managers of Drury Lane Theatre saw how matters were tending; and endeavoured to tie up their popular actress with future engagements at a greatly augmented salary. But for some little time she would commit herself neither way. She does not mention the fact in the account of the ‘Florizel’ correspondence given in her autobiography, but in a letter written in 1783 she says that previous to her first interview with the Prince she had been astonished to find in one of his charming letters a bond of a most solemn and binding character, signed by the Prince, and sealed with the Royal arms, containing a promise to pay her the sum of £20,000 immediately he came of age. She declares that she was greatly surprised to receive anything of this kind, for the idea of interest had never entered her mind. In fact,

she felt shocked and mortified at the indelicate idea of entering into any pecuniary engagements with the Prince. 'Secure in the possession of his heart, I had in that delightful certainty counted all my future treasure.' But it is significant that she granted no interview before she had received the bond; and she seems to have forgotten those shrewd representations in her Perdita letters of the distress in which she would be plunged if ever he should change in his sentiments towards her. However, she kept the bond: and it was well for her that she did so; for although the Prince's bonds did not always turn out to be of their face value, they were better than the Royal word. When she at length consented to grant the Prince an interview, the self-sacrificing Lord Malden proposed to lend his house in Dean Street, Mayfair, for the purpose; but the Prince found himself unable to escape from his tutor. He then recurred to his former suggestion of a visit to Buckingham Palace (or Buckingham House as it was then called) in male attire; but to this she objected as firmly as before. How and where the eventful interview did at last take place, she described, a few years afterwards, in a letter to a friend. It is necessary to remind the reader that in 1780 the Prince of Wales, and his brother the Duke of York, were living in seclusion at Boner Lodge, Kew, where their education was being conducted by the Bishop of Lichfield and other reputedly rigid tutors. Mrs. Robinson writes, in the approved novelist's style:—

'At length an evening was fixed for this long-dreaded interview. Lord Malden and myself dined at the inn on the island between Kew and Brentford. We waited the signal for crossing the river in a boat which had been engaged for the purpose. Heaven can witness how many conflicts my agitated heart endured at this most important moment! I admired the Prince; I felt grateful for his affection. He was the most engaging of created beings. I had corresponded with him during many months, and his eloquent

letters, the exquisite sensibility which breathed through every line, his ardent professions of adoration, had combined to shake my feeble resolution. The handkerchief was waved on the opposite shore ; but the signal was, by the dusk of the evening, rendered almost imperceptible. Lord Malden took my hand, I stepped into the boat, and in a few minutes we landed before the iron gates of Old Kew Palace. The interview was but for a moment. The Prince of Wales and the Duke of York (then Bishop of Osnaburg) were walking down the avenue. They hastened to meet us. A few words, and those scarcely articulate, were uttered by the Prince, when a noise of people approaching from the Palace startled us. The moon was now rising ; and the idea of being overheard, or of his Royal Highness being seen out at so unusual an hour, terrified the whole group. After a few more words of the most affectionate nature uttered by the Prince, we parted ; and Lord Malden and myself returned to the island. The Prince never quitted the avenue, nor the presence of the Duke of York, during the whole of this short meeting. Alas ! my friend, if my mind was before influenced by esteem, it was now awakened to the most enthusiastic admiration. The rank of the Prince no longer chilled into awe that being who now considered him as the lover and the friend. The graces of his person, the irresistible sweetness of his smile, the tenderness of his melodious yet manly voice, will be remembered by me till every vision of this changing scene shall be forgotten.'

She goes on to relate that many and frequent were the interviews which afterwards took place at this romantic spot ; but although their walks were sometimes continued till past midnight, the Duke of York ('then Bishop of Osnaburg !') and Lord Malden were always of the party, and their conversation was always 'composed of general topics !' She always wore a dark-coloured habit, and the rest of the party generally wrapped themselves in dark great-coats, except the Duke of York who alarmed the others by appearing in a most unecclesiastical coat of a conspicuous buff colour. It is somewhat inconsistent with this when, in the course of her raptures about the Prince, she goes on to say that—

'He sang with exquisite taste, and the tones of his voice, breaking on the silence of the night, have often appeared to my entranced senses like more than mortal melody. Often have I lamented the distance which destiny had placed between us. How would my soul have idolised such a *husband*! Alas! how often, in the ardent enthusiasm of my soul, have I formed the wish that that being were *mine alone*! to whom partial millions were to look up for protection.'

We know too much about this more than mortal young gentleman to sympathise very heartily with all this gushing sentiment. But we may be permitted to remark, with reference to her insistence on the secrecy of the proceedings, that on a dark night the tones of the Prince's voice must have been even louder than the Duke of York's buff coat. The Prince of Wales was just on the point of receiving his first separate establishment; and the caution observed, she says, was due to their apprehension that the knowledge of his attachment to a married woman might injure him in the opinion of the world. It would perhaps have been more correct to say that they feared it might injure his prospects of a very liberal settlement. However, his affection for her seemed to increase daily; she looked forward to the adjusting of his Royal Highness's establishment for 'the public avowal of our mutual attachment'; and considered herself as 'the most blest of human beings.'

If they meant to keep their connection a secret, they certainly went a very curious way about it, both at Kew and elsewhere. On the 31st of May, 1780, she made her last appearance on the boards of the theatre; having been an actress for only three years and a few months. And during the following summer, as she herself admits, the Prince sought opportunities to distinguish her more publicly than was prudent in his Royal Highness's situation. He appeared in her company at the King's hunt at Windsor, at reviews in the Park, at theatres, and other places of public entertain-

ment. One instance of his indiscretion she relates as follows:—

‘On the 4th of June, I went, by his desire, into the Chamberlain’s box at the birth-night ball; the distressing observation of the circle was drawn towards that part of the box in which I sat by the marked and injudicious attentions of his Royal Highness. I had not arrived many minutes before I witnessed a singular species of fashionable coquetry. Previous to his Highness’s beginning his minuet, I perceived a woman of high rank select from the bouquet which she wore two rosebuds, which she gave to the Prince, as he afterwards informed me, “emblematical of herself and him.” I observed his Royal Highness immediately beckon to a nobleman, who has since formed a part of his establishment, and, looking most earnestly at me, whisper a few words, at the same time presenting to him his newly acquired trophy. In a few moments Lord C—— entered the Chamberlain’s box, and, giving the rosebuds into my hands, informed me that he was commissioned by the Prince to do so. I placed them in my bosom, and, I confess, felt proud of the power by which I thus publicly mortified an exalted rival.’

The ‘diurnal prints’ now contained what she calls the most scandalous paragraphs respecting the Prince of Wales and herself, and whenever she appeared in public she was overwhelmed by the gazing of the multitude. She was frequently obliged to quit Ranelagh owing to the crowd which assembled and stared round her box, and she scarcely entered a shop without suffering the greatest inconvenience, sometimes having to wait for hours till the crowd which surrounded her carriage had dispersed. She professes that she did not like it; her heart, thank Heaven! was not formed in the mould of callous effrontery; she even shuddered at the gulf before her, and felt small gratification at having taken a step which—well, which many who condemned her would have been no less willing to imitate if they had had the opportunity. But, according to Miss Lætitia Hawkins (daughter of Dr. Johnson’s ‘unclubbable’

friend, Sir John Hawkins), who had many opportunities of observing her, as for a time they lived in the same street—our Perdita had always adopted a very extraordinary method of avoiding public attention. At the outset of her career she went about in a high phaeton, 'in which she was driven by the favoured of the day, three candidates and her husband were outriders, and this in the face of the congregations turning out of public worship.' Miss Hawkins admits that she was unquestionably very beautiful, though, in her opinion, more in face than in figure; and as she proceeded in her course, she acquired a remarkable facility in adapting her deportment to her dress.

'When she was to be seen daily in St. James's Street and Pall Mall, even in her chariot this variation was striking. To-day she was a *paysanne*, with her straw hat tied at the back of her head, looking as if too new to what she passed to know what she looked at. Yesterday, she, perhaps, had been the dressed *belle* of Hyde Park, trimmed, powdered, patched, painted to the utmost power of rouge and white lead; to-morrow she would be the cravatted Amazon of the riding-house: but, be she what she might, the hats of the fashionable promenaders swept the ground as she passed.'

At this time, too, she used to drive a light blue carriage, which the Prince had bought for her at a cost of nine hundred guineas, which bore in the centre of each of its panels, in addition to her monogram, a basket of flowers so artfully painted that at a little distance it might be mistaken for a coronet. But her triumph was soon over. While she was looking forward impatiently to the day 'when I might enjoy the public protection of that being for whom I had given up all,'—a phrase, by the way, which sounds as though she expected to live at Carlton House as a recognised appendage of the heir-apparent! she received a cold and unkind letter briefly informing her that they must meet no more. She repeats, again and again, and calls God to witness, that she was totally unaware of any just cause for

this sudden alteration in the Prince's sentiments. Only two days previously she had seen the Prince at Kew, and his affection 'appeared to be boundless as it was undiminished.' She wrote immediately for an explanation of what had so amazed and afflicted her. But there was no answer. Again she wrote, and then, as the Prince still maintained an inexplicable silence, she set out in a small pony phaeton for Windsor. The Prince refused to see her. She then consulted with Lord Malden and the Duke of Dorset; but they could neither of them account for this sudden change in the Prince's feelings. Nor, except on the supposition (for which, indeed, there are good grounds) that the fickle Prince was tired of her, and was in hot pursuit of another charmer, has it ever been accounted for to this day. Of course the 'diurnal prints' said things which were not very pleasant reading for her; and there were paragraphs and pamphlets which were not even decent reading, either for her or for anybody else. After a time she wrote to the Prince again complaining of his injustice in allowing such things to be said of her; whereupon, she declares, he wrote her a most eloquent letter, 'disclaiming the causes alleged by a calumniating world, and fully acquitting me of the charges which had been propagated to destroy me.' It is a pity she did not preserve this letter for insertion in her biography.

At this juncture, she says, Mr. Robinson constantly wrote to her in the language of unbounded affection; nor did he fail, when they met, to express his agony at their separation, and even a wish for reunion. How he had been supporting himself without having her salary to draw from the theatre treasury we are not told. The assiduities of Lord Malden, too, daily increased; and she admits that she had no other friend on whom she could rely for assistance or protection;

adding, in order to avoid misconstruction, 'when I say *protection*, I would not be understood to mean pecuniary assistance, Lord Malden being, at the time alluded to, even poorer than myself.' Another strange part of her story is that the Prince suddenly assured her of his wish to renew their former friendship and affection, and urged her to meet him at the house of Lord Malden in Clarges Street.

'After much hesitation, by the advice of Lord Malden, I consented to meet his Royal Highness. He accosted me with every appearance of tender attachment, declaring that he had never for one moment ceased to love me, but that I had many concealed enemies who were exerting every effort to undermine me. We passed some hours in the most friendly and delightful conversation, and I began to flatter myself that all our differences were adjusted. But what words can express my surprise and chagrin, when, on meeting his Royal Highness *the very next day* in Hyde Park, he turned his head to avoid seeing me, and even affected not to know me.'

Whatever may have been the cause, her predicament was certainly now a very awkward one. She was living in Cork Street, Burlington Gardens, in what she calls 'a neat but by no means splendid house,' that had been fitted up for the Countess of Derby on her separation from her lord. She was in debt to the extent of nearly £7000, with 'insulting' creditors hourly assailing her. And she was precluded from returning to her profession because it was believed that the public would not suffer her reappearance on the stage. Negotiations appear to have been going on with the Royal Family as early as August 1781, for in that month George III. wrote to Lord North.

'My eldest son got last year into an improper connection with an actress and woman of indifferent character through the friendly assistance of Lord Malden. He sent her letters and very foolish promises, which undoubtedly by her conduct she has cancelled. Colonel Hotham has settled to pay the enormous sum of £5000

for the letters, etc., being returned. You will therefore settle with him.'

What Perdita did with this £5000 does not appear; she does not even mention the circumstance; but probably some portion of it served to keep the 'insulting' creditors at bay. How she managed to support herself until 1783 neither she nor her daughter condescends to inform us. All they tell us is that after repeated applications to the Prince, of which he took no notice, the business was at length submitted to the arbitration of Charles James Fox, and that in 1783 her claims were adjusted by the grant of an annuity of £500 (presumably out of the public purse), half of which was to descend to her daughter at her decease. This settlement was to be considered as an equivalent for the return of the Prince's bond for £20,000, and as a consideration for 'the resignation of a lucrative profession at the particular request of his Royal Highness.' In the meantime, however, we may be sure she was not without offers of 'protection.' Huish, in his *Memoirs of George IV.*, tells a curious story which to that reverend gentleman's mind indicated that she treated all improper offers with a proper disdain. Amongst the most dashing of the city rakes of the time was the son of Alderman Pugh, who, ever since seeing Mrs. Robinson in the character of Juliet had been violently enamoured of her. Now, says Huish—

'He wrote to her, offering her twenty guineas for *ten minutes' conversation with her*. Mrs. Robinson immediately answered him, consenting to grant him the favour he asked for the stipulated sum; and elated with the prospect of the consummation of his wishes, Pugh repaired to the house of Mrs. Robinson at the appointed time. On his arrival, however, instead, as he expected, of being *closeted* with Mrs. Robinson, he was ushered into a room where he found that lady in company with General Tarleton and Lord Malden; and, on his entrance, Mrs. Robinson detached her watch from her side and laid it on the table. She then immedi-

ately turned from her former companions, and addressed her conversation wholly to Pugh, who, by the titter which sat on the countenances of General Tarleton and Lord Malden, evidently saw that he was a complete dupe in the hands of his beautiful innamorata. Mrs. Robinson now took up the watch, the ten minutes were expired; she rose from her chair, rang the bell, and on the servant entering, she desired him to open the door for Mr. Pugh, who, completely confounded, took his leave, minus twenty guineas, which, on the following day, were divided amongst four charitable institutions.'

If we may believe Miss Lætitia Hawkins, however, Mrs. Robinson about this time resided 'under protection' in Berkeley Square, and appeared to guests as mistress of the house as well as of its master; when her conversation was said, by those invited, to want refinement and decorum. Miss Hawkins adds that, in the hope of an aristocratic establishment, Mrs. Robinson would now have bribed her husband heavily to renounce her; but in both schemes she was foiled.

'I saw her one day handed to her extravagantly outrageous *vis-à-vis* by a man whom she pursued with a doting passion; all was still externally brilliant; she was fine and fashionable; and the men of the day in Bond Street still pirouetted as her carriage passed them: the next day the vehicle was reclaimed by the maker; the Adonis whom she courted fled her; she followed—all to no purpose.'

Some of the caricaturists of the day represented her as having formed a connection with Charles James Fox; and Horace Walpole wrote to the Earl of Harcourt in September 1782, saying—'Charles Fox is languishing at the feet of Mrs. Robinson. George Selwyn says—"Who should the *Man of the People* live with but with the *Woman of the People*?"' But this rumour appears to have had its only foundation in the fact that, at the time, Fox was negotiating between her and the Prince for a settlement of her claims. The only

connection of which we have authentic information was one with Colonel Tarleton. On 21st September 1782, the *Morning Post* favoured its readers with the following spicy item of fashionable intelligence :—

‘Yesterday a messenger arrived in Town, with the very interesting and pleasing intelligence of the *Tarleton*, armed ship, having, after a chase of some months, captured the *Perdita* frigate, and brought her safe into Egham port. The *Perdita* is a prodigious fine clean-bottomed vessel, and had taken many prizes during her cruise, particularly the *Florizel*, a most valuable ship belonging to the Crown, but which was immediately released, after taking out the cargo. The *Perdita* was captured by the *Fox*, but was afterwards re-taken by the *Malden*, and had a sumptuous suit of new rigging, when she fell in with the *Tarleton*. Her manœuvring to escape was admirable ; but the *Tarleton*, fully determined to take her or perish, would not give up the chase ; and at length, coming alongside the *Perdita*, fully determined to board her, sword in hand, she surrendered at discretion.’

Colonel Tarleton had been acquainted with Mrs. Robinson before her connection with the Prince of Wales. At the end of 1779 he was sent out to America, where he distinguished himself as a brilliant cavalry officer under Cornwallis ; and early in 1782, after the surrender of York Town and Gloucester (the latter of which he had held with five hundred men), he returned on parole to England. In September of that year he seems to have taken up his quarters with Mrs. Robinson ; and, for a time at least, they evidently went the pace. A paragraph from one of the ‘diurnal prints’ for 4th December 1782, unearthed by Mr. John Ashton, gives the following description of her turn-out :—

‘Mrs. Robinson now sports a carriage, which is the admiration of all the *charioteering* circles in the vicinity of St. James’s ; the body carmelite and silver, ornamented with a French mantle, and the cipher in a wreath of flowers ; the carriage scarlet and silver, the seat-cloth richly ornamented with silver fringe. Mrs.

Robinson's livery is green, faced with yellow, and richly trimmed with broad silver lace; the harness ornamented with stars of silver, richly and elegantly finished. The inside of the carriage is lined with white silk, embellished with scarlet trimmings.'

And she affected to wonder that a crowd collected when such an equipage as this, which might have belonged to a circus, stopped before a shop door! Mrs. Robinson's daughter is, not unnaturally, very reticent about the Tarleton affair; but she tells us in a footnote to the continuation of her mother's *Memoirs* that 'an attachment took place between Mrs. Robinson and Colonel Tarleton shortly after the return of the latter from America, which subsisted during sixteen years. On the circumstances which occasioned its dissolution,' she adds with tantalising brevity, 'it is neither necessary nor would it be proper to dwell.' Where the money came from for all the foregoing finery we may presume it would also not be proper to inquire.

It was in 1783, apparently, after having obtained a settlement of her claims on the Prince of Wales, that Mrs. Robinson determined to divert her mind from accumulating troubles by a little jaunt to Paris. She procured a number of introductions, including one to Sir John Lambert, an English banker resident there, and seems to have had a particularly good time of it. The obliging Sir John procured her comfortable apartments, a box at the opera, etc., and got up numerous parties for her amusement. The dissolute Duke of Orleans made overtures to her; but she had now learned not to put her trust in princes, and discreetly declined. He got up 'most enchanting *fêtes*' in the gardens of his place at Mousseau; but she only attended one, which was given in honour of her birthday, when the gardens were brilliantly illuminated, and every tree decorated with her initials. She also went to see

Marie Antoinette dine in public; attiring herself for the occasion in 'the most tasteful ornaments of Mademoiselle Bertin, the reigning milliner,' including 'a pale lustring train and body, with a tiffany petticoat, festooned with bunches of the most delicate lilac,' and a plume of white feathers for her head. How a lady with an annuity of no more than £500 could deck herself out in this style and expect to make both ends meet, we are not informed. However, Marie Antoinette was very pleased with her appearance, and in return for the pleasure of having a close look at the portrait of the Prince of Wales, which Mrs. Robinson wore suspended from her neck, the French queen presented *la belle Anglaise* with a purse (presumably empty) netted by her own royal hands. Soon after this she returned to England; when, as Miss Hawkins puts it, 'she took up a new life in London; became literary, brought up her daughter literary, and expressed without qualification her rage when her works were not urged forward beyond all others.' The brevity of this is only equalled by its unkindness; and it may be worth while to go in rather more detail into Mrs. Robinson's literary career. First, however, it will be necessary to say a word or two about her relations with Colonel Tarleton. We are told that it was her exertions in the service of Colonel Tarleton, when he was pressed by pecuniary embarrassment in 1784, that led to an unfortunate journey which proved fatal to her health. It appears that, while already exhausted by fatigue and anxiety, she slept in a damp post-chaise with the windows open, in the course of a long night journey, and so brought on rheumatic fever, which confined her to her bed for six months, and resulted in a permanent malady which entailed great suffering and completely deprived her of the use of her legs. The Colonel, says her daughter, accompanied her to the Continent, and by his affectionate

attentions sought to alleviate those sufferings of which he had been the involuntary occasion. But although, in successive years, she tried the baths at Aix-la-Chapelle, St. Amand, and other places, all treatment was inefficacious, and she remained a cripple from the age of twenty-six to the end of her days. Miss Hawkins thus records her last glimpse of her:—

‘On a table in one of the waiting-rooms of the Opera House was seated a woman of fashionable appearance, still beautiful, but not “in the bloom of beauty’s pride”; she was not noticed, except by the eye of pity. In a few minutes two liveried servants came to her; they took from their pockets long white sleeves, which they drew on their arms, they then lifted her up and conveyed her to her carriage; it was the then helpless paralytic Perdita!’

How long the Colonel’s affectionate attentions lasted cannot be stated with certainty. In the *Memoirs*, published in 1801, Miss Robinson says that ‘the attachment subsisted during sixteen years’; and in her Introduction to her mother’s collected poems in 1806, she says that the Colonel repaid her with neglect and ingratitude. Tarleton’s history, gathered from other sources, may be briefly given. In 1782, soon after taking up with Mrs. Robinson, he was gazetted Lieutenant-Colonel of Light Dragoons. Two years later he stood as parliamentary candidate for Liverpool and was defeated. In 1790 he secured the seat, and sat for the same constituency (with a short interval in 1806) until 1809. In 1787 he published a *History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Provinces of North America*, a quarto volume with a map and four plans, in the writing of which he was probably assisted by Perdita, and in which, by way of return for the honourable mention Cornwallis had made of him in despatches, he included what is said to be ‘a most malicious and false attack’ upon his late commander. In 1790 he became

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Colonel, and in 1794 Major-General. In 1798 he married a natural daughter of the fourth Duke of Ancaster, and subsequently became a General, a K.G.C.B., and a baronet.

Mrs. Robinson's literary career commenced in 1787, although she had twice previously produced a volume of more or less unsuccessful (and, truth to say, unreadable) poems. In the summer of that year she was ordered to Brighthelmstone for sea-bathing; where she doubtless saw rather more than she cared for of the ascendancy of Mrs. Fitzherbert over her quondam lover. One day there, while conversing with Richard, son of Edmund Burke, she poured forth what she solemnly declared to be an impromptu poem of over eighty lines; which so astonished her auditor that he induced her to commit it to writing for his father's *Register*; where it duly appeared, headed—*LINES to HIM WHO WILL UNDERSTAND THEM*. Whether he understood or not, the public understood well enough to whom she referred in such lines as :

‘Thou art no more my bosom’s friend ;
Here must the sweet delusion end,
That charmed my senses many a year’ ;

and the undeniable vogue which some of her poetry had for a time was doubtless in great part due to scarcely veiled references to the Prince of Wales wherein the deserted Perdita lamented in the following strain :

‘Where’er my lonely course I bend,
Thy image shall my steps attend ;
Each object I am doom’d to see,
Shall bid remembrance picture thee.’

It was somewhat overbold, however, when a lady of her antecedents proceeded to versify her copy-book maxims and put forth a ‘Sonnet to Chastity’ ! In 1790 she entered into a poetical correspondence with a Mr. Merry, who had been a member of the *Scuola della Crusca* in Florence, she

taking the names of 'Laura' and 'Laura Maria,' while he signed himself 'Della Crusca.' In 1791 appeared a quarto poem entitled *Ainsi va le Monde*, the two hundred and fifty lines of which, it is said, were written in twelve hours as a reply to Mr. Merry's *Laurel of Victory*. The modern critic whose duty may call him to peruse all this stuff will be apt to exclaim with an earlier, though not over-polite brother of the craft, that 'easy writing makes d——d hard reading'! But the public of Mrs. Robinson's day expressed so much approbation of her poetry, that she was encouraged to try them with a specimen of her prose; and, as it proved, with an equally satisfactory result. The first edition of a prose romance, called *Vancenza, or the Dangers of Credulity*, was sold out in one day; although, as even her daughter candidly admits, this production owed its popularity much more to the 'celebrity' of the author's name than to any intrinsic merit of its own. In the same year, 1792, a volume of collected poems bore the names of nearly six hundred subscribers 'of the most distinguished rank and talents.' In spite of her disabling disease and frequent attacks of the severest pain, her literary output was considerable, at any rate in quantity. Amongst her subsequent works, in prose and verse, may be mentioned five novels—*Angelica*, *The False Friend*, *Hubert de Serrac*, *Walsingham*, *The Natural Daughter*; three volumes of verse—*Sappho and Phaon*, a series of sonnets, *Lyrical Tales*, and *The Mistletoe*; some translations, and a pamphlet entitled *Thoughts on the Condition of Women*. Many other pamphlets and tracts have been attributed to her on more or less doubtful authority; and she unquestionably had the pen of a ready writer, and worked it most industriously to the last. She made two attempts at dramatic composition, which both turned out failures. A little farce, entitled *Nobody*, which she wrote in 1793 as a satire on female gamesters, caused a great uproar.

One of the principal performers (said to be Miss Farren) gave up her part at the last moment, alleging that the piece was intended to ridicule her particular friend; and at the last moment Mrs. Jordan kindly consented to fill the breach. But the piece was so persistently hissed, that after three nights it was withdrawn. A tragedy, entitled *The Sicilian Lover*, which she could not get put upon the stage at all, was published in quarto in 1796. Her literary earnings must have been considerable; but Wordsworth's motto, 'plain living and high thinking,' would have had to be inverted in her case; and from a letter in the Morrison collection of autographs, which is printed by Mr. Molloy in his Introduction to the 1894 reprint of her *Memoirs*, we learn that in 1794 she considered herself to have been so badly treated that she threatened to depart from an ungrateful country *for ever*.

'Let common sense judge [she writes] how I can subsist upon £500 a year, when my carriage (a necessary expense) alone costs me £200. My mental labours have failed through the dishonest conduct of my publisher. My works have sold handsomely but the profits have been theirs.'

She then goes on to express her disgust at seeing *him* to whom she ought to look for better fortune, lavishing favours on unworthy objects, while 'I, who sacrificed reputation, an advantageous profession, friends, patronage, the brilliant hours of youth, and the conscious delight of correct conduct, am condemned to the scanty pittance bestowed on every indifferent page who holds up his ermined train of ceremony.' It may be admitted that the Prince did not treat her very handsomely, either pecuniarily or otherwise. But her writings brought her in quite as much money as they were worth, while of praise they brought her a good deal more. She was called 'the English Sappho'; and indifferent occasional verses such as *Ainsi va le Monde* (which were

reeled off in a few hours) and *The Maniac* (which is only remarkable for having been dictated whilst she was under the influence of opium) were cited as the foundation upon which 'the lofty edifice' of her poetic fame would rest. Dr. Doran made a list of the eulogistic epithets bestowed upon her in a number of commendatory poems which may be found prefixed to the collected edition of her poetical works published in 1806. 'Merry declared that future ages would join "to pour in Laura's praise their melodies divine." Peter Pindar called her "*The nymph of my heart*"; Burgoyne pronounced her "perfect as woman and artist"; Tickell proclaimed her "*The British Sappho*"; John Taylor hailed her "*Pensive Songstress*"; Boaden recorded her "mentally perfect"; the Hon. John St. John asserted that "Nature had formed her Queen of Song"; Ker Porter saluted her in thundering heroics; and two theatrical parsons, Will Tasker and Paul Columbine, flung heaps of flowers at her feet, with the zeal of heathen priests before an incarnation of Flora.' All this may be commended as an object-lesson to some enthusiastic eulogists of more recent versifiers, who are apt to be equally free with their superlatives and prognostications of immortality.

During the last few years of her life, Mrs. Robinson lived in a small house in St. James's Place, to which her literary renown drew many admirers. Her daughter hints darkly at some entanglement by which her mother had 'laid herself open to the impositions of the selfish and the stratagems of the crafty' (a veiled reference perhaps to the unspecified evil conduct of Colonel Tarleton), which, in 1799, forced her to 'relinquish those comforts and elegancies to which she had been accustomed,' or, in other words, to give up her carriage and so exclude herself from all society or amusement except such as she could have in her own house. In the spring of 1800 her physician recommended

the Bristol Wells; and, not having the necessary means to pay for her journey, she wrote, explaining the circumstances, to a certain noble lord, and entreating that he would assist her by repaying part of a sum which she had lent him in the days of her greater prosperity. The very noble lord did not even condescend to answer the letter. She therefore had to be content with the quiet and the pure air of a cottage in the neighbourhood of Windsor. Here her strength flickered up a bit; and she was able to continue her contributions to the poetical corner of the *Morning Post*, as well as to do some other literary work, including the writing of her own *Memoirs*. Peter Pindar wrote to her on the 18th December:—

‘I have just heard that you have been exceedingly unwell: for God’s sake do not be foolish enough to die yet, as you possess stamina enough for an hundred years, and a poetical mind that cannot be replaced.’

But she was exhausted: and, after great suffering, she expired on the 26th of the month, having just completed her forty-second year. She requested to be buried in Old Windsor churchyard, ‘for a *particular reason*’; and earnestly requested that two ‘*particular persons*’ might receive a lock of her hair.



Mary Lumbel (Becky Wells)

FROM A DRAWING BY DOWNMAN

MARY SUMBEL ('BECKY' WELLS)

ECCENTRICS are plants that spring up in all places; but the stage is a sort of forcing-house calculated to bring on the most luxuriant variety. Such, at least, was the opinion of John Bernard, sometime secretary of the Beef-Steak Club, who adds that, amongst the numerous specimens of the genus, both male and female, whom he had met with in the course of his varied experience, Mrs. 'Becky' Wells was unquestionably pre-eminent. She was an admirable actress in comedy; and although she naturally suffered by the comparison when injudiciously brought into competition with Mrs. Siddons, she nevertheless appears to have been an eminently respectable performer in tragedy. But, whatever difference of opinion there may have been as to her histrionic merits, she was generally admitted by her contemporaries to be the most beautiful woman seen on the stage during her time; and a brief recital of some of the fantastic parts which she played when off the stage will bring most readers to agree with John Bernard as to her pre-eminence in eccentricity. There is no doubt that, at one period of her life, poor Becky Wells was actually insane, and very properly confined in the asylum of Dr. Willis at Gretford; for although, in her *Memoirs*, she endeavours to make out that her confinement there was due, not to any mental derangement from which she suffered, but to the interested motives of unscrupulous people, she herself unwittingly affords us the evidence for arriving at a different conclusion. Her *Memoirs*, which appeared during

her lifetime, in two volumes in 1811, were, like those of Mrs. Bellamy, put together by herself with the assistance of some hack writer; and, like most of the theatrical memoirs of the time, are very confused in arrangement, and almost totally devoid of dates. Nevertheless, with a little extraneous assistance, we are enabled to make out a fairly connected history of her eccentric career.

She tells us little of her ancestry; remarking, with a quip at certain other celebrated stage ladies who had attempted to establish a long pedigree, that the original founders of her family were probably Adam and Eve. Her grandfather was a poor Welsh curate named Davies, who kept an 'academy' in Soho Square, had a large family, and, 'being very fond of pouring forth libations to Bacchus, expired one day while offering up his orisons to the jolly god.' Her father, who was the eighth son of this poor curate, after being apprenticed as a carver and gilder, settled in Birmingham, where his daughter Mary was born in or about the year 1759. Her father, it appears, 'had the honour to attend Mr. Garrick,' when David went to Stratford-on-Avon to dig up the root of Shakespeare's mulberry-tree; and the box which was made out of the wood thereof was carved by Davies's partner. But this partner, whose appropriate name was Griffin, behaved like a very dragon. For, casting covetous eyes on his neighbour's wife, he lent Davies money, and then at a time when he knew it would be impossible for the latter to repay, he clapped an execution into the house; with the result that poor Davies was instantly paralysed by the shock, and soon after went raving mad. Yates, then manager of the Birmingham theatre, persuaded his friend Mrs. Davies to try the stage. He kindly gave her a free benefit; and she appeared as Indiana in *The Conscious Lovers*; but although the audience, being acquainted with her circumstances, was very sympathetic, she was seized with stage fright, and

unable to articulate a single word. Shortly afterwards the kindly Yates introduced Mary to the boards; and in boys' parts, such as those of Arthur in *King John*, or the Duke of York in *Richard the Third*, she did very well. When the Birmingham theatre closed for the season, Mrs. Davies and her young family went to try their fortune in her native city, Bath; and, on the strength of a letter of recommendation from Yates, the manager of the theatre there, gave Mary an engagement at a salary of five shillings a night. She proudly refers to this circumstance in her autobiography, as enabling her to boast that her theatrical career did not *commence* among strollers, which was more than a good many of her celebrated contemporaries could truthfully say. But, 'as most, if not all, of our first-rate performers have either sprung from, or at some period or other joined, a strolling company,' she has no objection to admit that she also had her days of strolling. After going to York, where she performed three nights only, Tate Wilkinson gave them a recommendation to a strolling manager named Butler, who kept a company going between Harrogate, Ripon, and Pontefract. As they arrived just when the company happened to be very deficient in dresses, Butler was glad to engage not only the daughter but the mother also, for the latter fortunately had with her quite an extensive assortment of costumes. After a time, however, Mary fancied she was slighted in favour of some relation of Mrs. Butler's, and she and her mother transferred their services to another company, run by Crump and Chamberlain, at Cheltenham. While acting at Gloucester, she played Juliet to the Romeo of a young actor named Wells; and, after a very short courtship, and much against her mother's wishes, she and Wells were presently married at Shrewsbury. This was in 1777, when Mary was eighteen years of age. Immediately after their marriage, Mary persuaded her husband to send for her

sister from Bristol; and the three of them procured an engagement at the Exeter theatre. Shortly after their arrival there, Wells one day sent her to her mother with a note, which on being opened proved to be to the following effect :—

‘Madam, As your daughter is too young and childish, I beg you will for the present take her again under your protection; and be assured I shall return to her soon, as I am now going a short journey, and remain, yours, etc.’

As a matter of fact, Wells had gone off with the young woman who acted as Mary’s bride’s-maid; and she never set eyes on him again. She wastes no words of regret on the absconding Romeo; and probably she was better off without him; for she seems to have been regularly employed at the Exeter theatre for the next two or three years. John Bernard made her acquaintance about this time, and says she was playing the second-rate ‘walking ladies,’ or rather ‘jumping girls,’ in the farces, who had merely to say they ‘love Charles dearly,’ or they ‘won’t marry Mr. Higgin-bottom.’ But, being young and pretty, Bernard chose her to play Becky Chadwallader in Foote’s *Author*, on the occasion of his benefit. He declares that she was rather afraid to undertake the part until he encouraged her by saying that if she would merely put her thumb in her mouth and look as usual, she would fulfil Foote’s idea to perfection. Her success in this character was so great, says Bernard, that it obtained for her next summer an opening at the Haymarket, where she established herself as ‘the greatest simpleton of her time.’ He adds that this was one of those sudden transitions from obscurity to eminence with which dramatic history is so frequently marked.

In June 1781 she appeared at the Haymarket, as Becky Chadwallader, and as Madge in Bickerstaffe’s *Love in a Village*, making an excellent impression in both characters.

Three months later, she scored a more pronounced success as the first Cowslip in O'Keeffe's *Agreeable Surprise*. Two of these names stuck to her for life; and she was ever after almost equally well known as 'Cowslip' and as 'Becky' Wells. In September and October of the same year, she appeared at Drury Lane, under Ford and Sheridan's management, as Nancy in *The Camp*, as Harriet in *The Jealous Wife*, as Widow O'Grady in *The Irish Widow*, and as Jacintha in *The Suspicious Husband*. For a young girl of twenty-two, she had thus far done exceedingly well in her profession; but of course there were jealousies and bickerings with some of the other performers. She relates that when she first attended rehearsal for *The Suspicious Husband*, Miss Farren came into the green-room, and, staring her in the face, exclaimed, 'Good God! ma'am. Are you to play Jacintha?' And on receiving a reply in the affirmative, she immediately turned to the acting manager and said she should throw up her part of Clarinda, as she was sure Mrs. Wells would never be capable of such a character as she had undertaken. Stung to the quick by such a speech 'from a woman who had only lately emancipated herself from the trammels of a strolling company,' Becky threw down her part in a rage, and instantly went off home. But a letter was sent after her to say that she was to go on studying the part, as Miss Farren *must* play with her; and this, says Becky, she was obliged, to her no small mortification, to do. Soon after this, Mrs. Siddons refused to play if Becky had the secondary parts; and she reminds those ladies that it would by no means have detracted from their high reputations if they had then condescended to give a little encouragement to a young woman who was not only earning her own living, but was also the sole support of a mother, a sister, and a brother. However, as they did their best to debar her from the secondary parts, she did her best

to secure some of the first; and when her benefit night came round in April 1783, she elected to appear as Jane Shore. Fortunately for her, a crowded audience rewarded this effort with such great applause that (as she tells us) the managers shortly afterwards gave her the part of Imogen; wherein, though it is a particularly arduous task for a young performer, she did so well that Woodfall's *Chronicle*, after instancing the effect she produced in certain passages, declared that had her acting been equally sustained throughout, she would have 'rivalled the proudest on the stage.' There is probably some failure of memory in this account; for she does not appear to have played Imogen until three years after her first appearance as Jane Shore. But in 1784 she appeared in the title part of *Isabella*, and as Lady Randolph in *Douglas*; when the *Chronicle* said that if she had not been already known as one of the most original and excellent comedians of the day, people would have thought more of her powers as a tragic actress; and that, if, after these performances, the managers did not put her prominently forward in both classes, they would 'deserve to be marked as the dullest dunces that ever blundered.' The *Chronicle* also goes on to inform us that the scene in *Douglas* wherein Lady Randolph faints came near to proving a fatal one for the young actress. It appears that Mrs. Inchbald, who should have supported Lady Randolph when she fell, was 'attending to her own sweet person, or rolling her vacant eyes on the galleries,' so that if Bensley had not sprung forward and caught her as she fell back, Mrs. Wells would have fallen with full force to the ground, and probably fractured her skull. The danger was so apparent that there was a general scream; and Mrs. Wells was so affected that she remained in hysterics behind the scenes for half an hour after. But when the possibility of a fatal ending to the accident was brought to the notice of Mrs. Inchbald after

the conclusion of the play, that lady is reported to have calmly observed—'Then we should have had the tragedy *realised*.'

As already noted, Mrs. Wells's autobiography is remarkable for the absence of dates; but it must have been about this time that she first became acquainted with Edward Topham, an officer in the Life Guards, who had a very pretty talent for the writing of prologues and epilogues. He was almost as eccentric a character as Becky herself. Professionally, he was something of a martinet; and his picture, labelled 'the Tip-Top adjutant,' was a familiar figure in the print-shops. He drove about in a curricie, constructed after a plan of his own, drawn by four fine black horses, splendidly caparisoned, and followed by two grooms in conspicuous liveries. His own dress was revolutionary; for at a time when everybody else wore very long coats and waistcoats, and very short breeches, that required perpetual pulling up to prevent them from falling off in the street, his costume consisted of a short velvet coat with large cut-steel buttons, a very short white waistcoat, and leather breeches so long in their upper quarters as almost to reach his chin. Frederick Reynolds found him a ready-made 'character' for the stage; and put him into play after play; always, it appears, with Topham's full consent and approbation. The major used to say:—

'Now if I were to sit for my portrait to Reynolds's name-sake, Sir Joshua, it would cost me a considerable sum. But in this case I get painted for nothing; and, without hurting *me*, my friend the artist not only materially benefits *himself*, but my likeness, when finished, instead of being exhibited in a dull gallery, for the cold criticism of a few solitary connoisseurs, is every night displayed in a crowded theatre for the gratification and applause of thousands.'

His friend the dramatist certainly benefited by the proceeding, for he calculates that his profits out of Topham alone, as depicted in different comedies, must have amounted to

upwards of a thousand pounds. In a sketch of Topham's career which appeared some years afterwards in the seventh volume of *Public Characters*, and which Becky judges to have been written by the eccentric major himself, we are told, in somewhat high-flown phraseology, that:—

‘Mrs. Wells, of Drury Lane theatre, confessedly one of the most beautiful women of the day in which she lived, through the medium of a friend, sent to request him to write her an epilogue for her benefit. He naturally did not deny her request; and of course the reading and instructing her in the delivery produced interviews, which the company of a woman so beautiful must always make dangerous. . . . What did occur may be easily supposed. . . . It may also be naturally supposed that in return for the greatest gift a man can receive, the heart of a most beautiful woman, that he would devise every method to become serviceable to her interests and dramatic character, and think his time and talents never better employed than in advancing the reputation of her he loved. . . . It was this idea which first inspired the thought of establishing a public print. It has been said, more than metaphorically, that “Love first created the *World*.” Here it was realised. Gallantry began what literature supported, and politics finished.’

In plain prose, what all this means is that Becky (who says she was captivated with the beauty of Topham's *mind*) went to live with him at his house in Bryanston Street, where she ‘became the mother of two lovely daughters’; and that in January 1787 they removed to Beaufort Buildings, and established *The World* newspaper. According to Topham this paper not only ‘gave the *tone* to politics,’ but, ‘what to him was still dearer, it contributed to the fame of the woman he loved.’ It appears to have done other things besides, however; for Gifford speaks of its unqualified and audacious attacks on private characters; and Hannah More expresses her disgust at its accounts of elopements, divorces, and suicides, ‘tricked out in all the elegancies of Mr. Topham's phraseology.’ The *World* was also the medium through which the ‘Della Cruscan’ poetry of Merry and Mrs.

Robinson first entranced an admiring public. Through its pages, day by day, Topham first issued his amusing *Life of his friend Elwes the miser* (a 'serial story' which is said to have sent up the circulation by 1,000 copies daily) and he made an even greater hit with a prolonged correspondence between the pugilists Humphries and Mendoza, on the affairs of the prize ring. Topham would evidently be considered an acquisition on the staff of many a newspaper at the present day. But he tells us that the labour of conducting a daily paper for five years was a serious strain on his constitution. Becky thought that he did not give sufficient credit for her share of the work; and she declares that, for the greater part of the time, the heat and burden of the day was borne by her. Certainly Topham was frequently in the country, either at 'Cowslip Hall' (a house in Essex which he had named after the character in which his charmer was so popular) or elsewhere; and a number of letters from him, which she prints in her *Memoirs*, show that 'My dearest and best Pud,' who remained in town, had, during these absences at any rate, a good deal to do with the management. He relied upon her to read proofs, to give instructions to reporters, to interview people on business matters, and to report to him all that went on at the office. On one occasion he writes—'I hear with great pleasure that the numbers of the *World* printed on Friday were 2,600. There's credit for *you*, you old Pud!' When she has been ill, she is bidden to 'take care of yourself, and when you have been quiet some time, take care of the *World*.' She was to attract likely contributors:—'Simon can be of use, I see, and seems to have a knack of writing fashionable fiddle-faddle; in regard to which you may promise him, if he does well, he shall have the special privilege of mentioning himself.' She was also urged to continue certain contributions of her own, under the signature of 'Old Kent'; some of which he pronounced to

be 'very good.' While Topham was in the country, she daily attended the trial of Warren Hastings, and dictated from memory a report of the proceedings and speeches to the clerks of the *World*. Everybody knows Macaulay's glowing account of that memorable State trial in the Great Hall of William Rufus, 'which had resounded with acclamations at the inauguration of thirty kings'; when, amongst princes and the ambassadors of great Kings and Commonwealths, there were gathered together grace and female loveliness, wit and learning, the representatives of every science and every art. The historian does tell us that 'there Siddons, in the prime of her majestic beauty, looked on a scene surpassing all the imitations of the stage.' But he does not tell us that there also sat Becky Wells, taking in all the details of the scene, day by day, and publishing it, in and to the *World*, each succeeding morning. One day Becky's next neighbour was a fashionably dressed person, who appeared to be so fearful of contamination that she tucked in her skirts and edged as far away as it was possible to get on the same bench. But presently a certain Duchess turned round, and, after a few civil words, requested to be allowed to look at the newspaper which Becky had in her hand. Seeing this, the fashionably dressed person presently edged herself back again, and, with a compliment and an insinuating smile, begged to be indulged with the sight of the newspaper which the Duchess had just returned. Whereupon the indignant Becky, in a voice loud enough to be heard all around, told the toady she would see her at the Devil first! There also occurred a little accident with a bottle in Becky's pocket, which furnished matter for a column in next day's *Morning Post*. The column was headed—'Trial in Westminster Hall: Brandy v. Becky,' and set forth that Messrs. Bottle and Brandy had brought an action against Becky Topham, for that she, not having the fear of shame before her eyes,

did wilfully, knowingly, and of intention aforethought; and being instigated by the love of liquor, bring in her pocket, into the gallery of Westminster Hall, a certain bottle made of glass, which said bottle was filled with a certain liquor called brandy, contrary to the rules and orders of the said Court, and contrary to the dignified character of sobriety.' The whole of this *jeu d'esprit*, with its amusing speech of counsel and *obiter dicta* of the judge, is too broad for modern taste; but it is noteworthy that the person prosecuted in the indictment is said to have been 'lately married to an odd sort of a fellow, one Tip-Top, a queer, lusty, strange-made, ugly creature, as you'd see from York Town to Ratcliffe Cross.' Becky admits that she did have an accident with a bottle in Westminster Hall, but declares that it was an innocent bottle of lavender water, which she accidentally sat upon and broke; adding that the facetious reporter of the *Morning Post* may be assured that had it been brandy she would have taken more care of it!

It was about this time, according to John Bernard, that Becky first began to display her eccentricities. He says that she loved to oppose all the tastes and customs of the world; to wear furs in summer, and muslins in winter; to improve her health by riding down to Oxford or Cambridge in hackney coaches; and to indulge in a number of other vagaries, for which the gallant editor supplied the means with his purse, and of which he defended the propriety with his pen. And he relates that when Miss Pope was one day endeavouring to reason her out of some extravagance by asking her to think what the world would say of such conduct, Becky, whose head ran only upon Topham's *World*, replied—'I beg your pardon, ma'am, the *World* never abuses me!' It was her own intrinsic merit, however, aided by her great beauty, and not altogether the puffery of the *World*, which raised her to the position of one of the most popular actresses of

her time. Anthony Pasquin, in his *Children of Thespis*, thus referred to her in 1786 :—

‘Come hither, ye sculptors, and catch every grace
That Fate interwove in a heaven-formed face ;
For ’tis Wells, the resistless, that bursts on the sight,
To wed infant rapture and strengthen delight.
When she smiles, Youth and Valour their trophies resign ;
When she laughs she enslaves—for that laugh is divine.’

Bernard calls her the greatest simpleton of her time; but she does not seem to have been devoid of ideas, for in 1785, she tells us, she suggested to Topham the incidents and situations which he worked up into his farce called *The Fool*, a claim which is corroborated by the terms of the dedication of the farce to her, wherein Topham acknowledges that for the happiest parts of it he was indebted to her judgment and imagination. In 1787, when Palmer opened the theatre he had built in Wellclose Square, he engaged Mrs. Wells, as well as Quick and Mrs. Martyr, at very good salaries. But the winter managers of the Patent theatres determined to crush their new rival, and sent word to the performers that if they attempted to act they should be given into custody for playing without a licence. Quick had an accident which prevented his appearance; and the two ladies, having no ambition to be treated as rogues and vagabonds, threw up their engagement. A strolling company from the country was therefore called in—and all were taken into custody. Palmer then offered Mrs. Wells £50 a night to give her ‘Imitations’ there; which she did, for three nights, with great success. The *Public Advertiser* said that she gave, ‘not the defects but the beauties of a Crouch, George, Wrighten, Martyr, Sestini, and a Cargill,’ concluding with equally clever imitations of Mrs. Crawford, Mrs. Siddons, and her own ‘Cowslip,’ and that never did her beautiful and expressive countenance depict the features of others so

faithfully. In June 1788 the manager of Covent Garden raised her salary to £9 a week for the next season, and £10 a week for the succeeding one. In 1789, Watson at Cheltenham and Hughes at Weymouth offered her the same terms as were given to Mrs. Siddons and Mrs. Jordan for country engagements. She went to Cheltenham first; and remarked on the wonderful contrast between this and her former visit to the place. Then, she played Juliet in a barn, where the actors' and actresses' dressing-rooms were divided from each other merely by a torn blanket. Now, she found an elegant theatre; and had the honour of being commanded by their Majesties to play Cowslip on the first night of her arrival. Hughes also wrote from Weymouth to say that the royal family only awaited her arrival to command some play in which she excelled. But thereby hangs a story; to which of course she makes no reference whatever, and which may be here given in the words of John Bernard.

‘Of all Becky’s peculiarities, perhaps the greatest was her imagining that every man she saw or spoke to fell in love with her. As she visited the public places, the consequence was that she set down all his Majesty’s ministers, and half the nobility of the land, as her dying innamoratos. But she went further, and wanted to make Topham call them all out (six at a time, in the manner of Bobadil) to revenge the insulted dignity of her feelings. But this depopulation of all the squares at the West End was a task he declined. Becky’s malady reached a climax in her supposing that our late beloved and most virtuous monarch [George III.] was among the number of her victims, she having been pointed out to him in the Park shortly after his recovery from his first mental attack. When the sovereign was advised to try sea air and water at Weymouth, Becky followed him, hired a yacht at a guinea a day (for which Topham paid) and attended him in all his excursions. This evidence of loyalty, when first observed, was grateful to the bosom of the man who was indeed “a father to his people”; and he used to exclaim: “Mrs. Wells—Wells—Wells! Good Cowslip—fond of the water, eh?” But the daily demonstration of her attachment grew at length to be very singular, if not

serious. Whenever his Majesty cast his eye over the blue element, there was the bark of Becky careering in pursuit of him; the infatuated woman reposing on the deck, in all the languor and sumptuousness of Cleopatra. The royal attendants now began to suspect her motives; and the sovereign became so annoyed at his eternal attendant, that whenever he espied a sail he eagerly enquired: "It's not Wells, is it?" or on perceiving the dreaded boat: "Charlotte, Charlotte, here's Wells again!"

Bernard goes on to relate that he had heard nothing of all this when, in the following year, while he was managing the Plymouth theatre, Becky Wells, in flying finery of dress and buoyancy of person, attended by a female friend tolerably old and ugly as an object of contrast, came sailing into the town in a pleasure yacht, and at once offered her services to the theatre. Of course her offer was very cordially accepted. George III. was expected in the course of a few days; and Bernard naturally assumed that the king would honour the theatre, in that town as elsewhere, for a night or two during his stay. Royal nights always producing overflows, he accordingly resolved to make the most of the expected harvest, and went to the trouble and expense of enclosing the entire pit as boxes.

'As soon as his Majesty arrived, I penned an appropriate address, to which I obtained the signatures of all the principals in Plymouth. This address was received by Lady Edgecombe (one of my best patrons) to be laid before the Queen, who was pleased to express a gracious approbation of my exertions, and to enquire the entertainments I proposed. I enumerated the pieces, and (little suspecting the rock I should split on) said that, in addition to the strength of the company, Mrs. Wells of Covent Garden had volunteered her services. This was reported to his Majesty, who, congratulating himself most likely on his escape from her attentions, heard the name with surprise and vexation: "Wells, Wells! —Wells again!—Cowslip's mad!—on sea, on land, haunts me everywhere!" Lady Edgecombe was then instructed to inform me that his Majesty would not visit the Plymouth theatre during his stay; though the cause I was left to surmise, or glean else-

where. Our expenses were therefore thrown away, and our expectations laughed at. Thus Mrs. Wells, by her eccentricity, this summer cost me at least one hundred pounds, and Topham two.'

Soon after this, her sister was married to a young man of prepossessing manners and good education, named Samuel. He had been too incautiously assumed to be a man of means and respectable connections, for they afterwards discovered him to be an apostate Jew, overwhelmed with debt, and earning a precarious living by writing paragraphs for the *Morning Post*. Becky was able to transfer him to the *World*, where he earned double money; but after a very little while his creditors threw him into the Fleet, where he had to be supported by Becky, while at the same time, of course, she had to find means for her sister's subsistence outside. After some consideration, it was arranged that Becky should release her brother-in-law from prison, and pay his expenses while he learned enough to enable him to take a situation as a surgeon in India, which her interest was able to obtain for him. In order to do this she borrowed money on bond; and when at length she paid the passage of himself and his wife out to India, he faithfully promised to repay her extensive loans at the earliest possible moment. But he never sent her a penny: and she was presently in trouble with her creditors. For some time she managed to avoid arrest by such stratagems as taking lodgings, or sending her servant to the theatre in a carriage while she slipped in by a private door. But this could not be kept up for ever; and at length they got her into a sponging-house. Topham was not in London, but she sent for his friend Frederick Reynolds, who at once went off to the office of the *World*, and obtained the money necessary for her release. After relating this, she makes the astounding assertion that this was the only pecuniary obligation

she was under to that gentleman in her whole life! If she meant Reynolds instead of Topham, the ambiguity of her language must have been carefully calculated to mislead the careless reader. Reynolds, she says, was the intimate friend of Topham, and had been upon terms of the strictest friendship with her also, as certain of his letters, which she prints, conclusively show; 'but at the time those professions were made I was in prosperity. His conduct towards me since I have been immersed in misfortunes convinces me that none of them were sincere.' She declares, moreover, that he was guilty of ingratitude, for it was entirely owing to her persistence that his play of *The Dramatist* was ever acted, and Reynolds *the dramatist* consequently rescued from the obscurity in which he would in all probability have otherwise ever remained.

The account which Reynolds himself gives in his autobiography of his relations with Becky differs materially from hers; but it is likely enough that neither of them told the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Nobody, apparently, has hitherto identified the beautiful actress to whom Reynolds devotes a whole chapter of his *Life and Times*, with Becky Wells. He does not mention her name; but a comparison of their several accounts of an excursion to France, and of various journeys in England, places it beyond a doubt that his 'fair companion' was no other person. According to her account, Reynolds merely acted as her travelling escort on one or two occasions, at the special request of Topham. According to Reynolds's account, she lived with him for four years.

'She who, in point of beauty [he says], was certainly the leading theatrical star; she who had rejected the overtures of half the rank and fashion in London, now, from some unaccountable cause, preferred to the whole crowd of pains-taking aspirants an alarmed and nervous author. Self-interest, certainly, could not have had

much influence in this proceeding, for, as I have before stated, I could neither boast of personal nor pecuniary attractions.'

It was apparently some time early in 1790 that Becky was arrested; and after her liberation was under the necessity of hiding from other creditors. It was at about the same date that Frederick Reynolds was recommended to go into the country after an attack of rheumatic fever. He chose for his retreat, he tells us, a solitary farm-house close to Netley Abbey.

'There I ruralised; but, like other recluses, not exactly alone;—I was accompanied by the before-mentioned celebrated actress, who, being suddenly involved in pecuniary difficulties, found this dreary spot sufficiently retired, during this desolate season, to screen her from the most active pursuers.'

But Netley Abbey in mid-winter, and a ruinous farm-house, where 'mice and rats and such small deer' interrupted each interesting *tête-à-tête*, were found by both Reynolds and his fair companion to be very productive of restlessness and despondency. There were also other causes of discomfort.

'Owing to my fair companion's fear of being discovered, she never stirred out; and this circumstance, conjoined with her mysterious concealment of her name, so excited our Hampshire host's—(I might without great injustice write Hampshire *hog's*)—curiosity, that one day to a neighbour asking who we were, he surlily replied—"Dang it, that's what I do just want to know; and if, as I suspect, d'ye see, that they be player folk, icod, I will whip them up before the squire under the vagrancy act."

They did not wait for this threat to be carried into execution, for it so happened that they were obliged to make a hasty departure in consequence of the lady's pursuers having discovered her retreat. When they paid the farmer rather more than he demanded, and likewise made presents to his wife and his servant, the surly

fellow's feelings were somewhat mollified; and as they stepped into the covered cart which they had hired to take them away, he pleasantly remarked:—

‘You see I have no pride; not a bit of the gentleman about me; so *that*—(snapping his fingers)—for the disgrace; and if you do again come this way, and want your old quarters, ye shall have them, d’ye see; odraten, though I be *whipped at the cart’s tail* along with ye.’

Reynolds says that they made straight for Dover, and reached Calais in the middle of March 1792. Their reception by the *sans-culottes* was scarcely what they had expected; for, according to his description, they were landed and thrown on to the pier like dead salmon into a fish-monger’s basket.

‘The moment we cast anchor in the harbour, at least forty *poissardes*, rushing into the water, waded towards our vessel. Whilst I stood stupidly watching their motions, about half a dozen, who had swarmed up, without my observation, the other side, came suddenly behind me on the deck, and lifting me off my legs as suddenly dropped me into the arms of certain of their fair associates, who were standing breast-high in the water. In spite of my entreaties and expostulations, two of my supporters bore me triumphantly to the shore, and deposited me, more than half-drowned, and bursting with spleen, at the foot of the perpendicular ladder leading to the summit of the pier. Here for a moment I thought my sufferings had terminated; but I was soon undeceived, for, determining to conclude in an equally happy style the politeness they had so happily commenced, one of my tormentors, seizing my hand, proceeded to mount, dragging me after her; while the other followed, banging and propelling me behind, and otherwise indecorously conducting herself, as she continued to vociferate—“*Montez, misérable !—allez vite ment !—dépêchez donc !*”’

His equally nervous companion was similarly treated, and arrived by this ‘light and elegant conveyance,’ bursting with wounded pride and suppressed indignation. And she

was speedily subjected to a further indignity. After finding an inn, and changing their wet and muddy garments, they sat down at the *table d'hôte* with a party of officers, or at least, says Reynolds, 'of people in military dresses.' Before their meal was finished, he was called from the room to arrange some dispute with the customs officers; and when he returned his companion had disappeared. A waiter informed him that the lady had retired to her private apartment, and was most anxious for him to come to her there. He found her greatly enraged, and evidently expecting him to avenge the insults to which she had been subjected. The moment he had quitted the room, she declared, 'those sons of equality and commonalty, conceiving I suppose, Sir, that I was also common property, one and all rushed towards me, and I only escaped their insolent gallantries by taking refuge here.' Reynolds had to persuade her that he was not exactly the sort of person to call a whole revolutionary *table d'hôte* to account; and they concluded that they must make allowances for the disturbed state of the country, and make the best of their situation. According to her account she immediately went to the Benedictine Convent, and agreed to become an inmate, paying a sum in advance and sending in her trunks, and was only prevented from passing her time there by an order from the National Assembly for the destruction of all such places. Reynolds gives a somewhat different account of the matter. She was, he admits, possessed with the romantic idea of settling in a convent; but as soon as she had been ushered by a sombre porter into a gloomy parlour hung with tattered tapestry, she at once revolted from the idea of such seclusion, and the dreary room having at one end a large iron grating covered behind with a dark green curtain, made her shudder and wish herself well outside again. Just as she was urging Reynolds to escape before any one came, they heard the sound of an

organ and the chanting of nuns, the dark curtain was drawn, and a dignified Lady Superior stood before them. Reynolds mustered up sufficient self-possession to blurt out in broken French that the state of mind and health of his companion had made her desirous of reposing for a short time in that sacred asylum.

‘The *grande religieuse* bowing assent, with silent but encouraging dignity, I again ventured to proceed—“My friend, Madame, will most cheerfully and strictly conform to all your rules—and then the terms—the payment, Madame?”—Here the Superior, casting on us a full penetrating look, and then withdrawing her eyes and raising them slowly and solemnly towards heaven, as if absorbed in deep contemplation, I began to fear that this worldly remark had excited her indignation;—when, at that moment, to my utter surprise, she calmly and solemnly exclaimed—“Pray, does the lady find her own tea and sugar?”’

The fact was, adds Reynolds, though he did not know it at the time, those Calais convents were much less like seminaries for French vestals than preparatory schools for young English ladies, or even Bath lodging-houses. However, as soon as they could decently get out of the place, the would-be recluse immediately expressed a desire to go to the theatre; and so long as they remained in France, she never wished to see the inside of a convent again. Becky says they remained at Calais about two months; Reynolds says three. But it appears from a letter addressed by Topham to Reynolds that within a fortnight of their arrival there he had arranged with Mrs. Wells’s creditors that she was to devote to them £4 each week from her winter engagements, £3 each week from her summer engagements, and a quarter of each of her benefits, and that this arrangement made her free to return to England. Within twenty-four hours of the receipt of this letter, says Reynolds, they had exchanged *la terre du terrorisme* for the land of commerce and com-

fort, honey and money. Immediately on their return she resumed her duties in the theatre; but, says the dramatist:—

‘Within a few months of our arrival in London, the wild and eccentric character of my fair fellow traveller, which had lately been subdued by her pecuniary distresses, again broke forth with additional violence. In a romantic spot in Sussex she formed a hermitage, and, like Charles the Fifth, and Madame de la Vallière, she determined, in the full blaze of her power and beauty, to lead a life of seclusion.’

The circumstance excited so much interest in the neighbourhood, and everybody so loudly and anxiously expressed a desire to see the fair recluse, that she philanthropically resolved, before shutting out the world for ever, to give a masquerade! She felt sure that although few people would ever be induced to travel so far, to an out-of-the-way place, for any commonplace country lady's party, a *fête champêtre* given by a hermitess would draw all the county; and of course it did. Such, it is said, was the effect her beauty, singing, dancing, and dramatic talent produced on all her masked beholders, that ‘the charming theatrical recluse’ became the leading toast of the county.

How long this seclusion lasted we are not informed, but after no very long time she returned to London, appeared every evening in a new and popular character, exhibited herself every day in Hyde Park in a new and conspicuous chariot, with four fine horses and outriders (at whose expense is not specified), and so increased the number of her admirers that at last, declares Reynolds, her very success became a sort of chagrin; and one fine day, to his great astonishment, she swooped down upon him, told him that she had discovered the real nature of her complaint to be madness, and compelled him to set off with her on a visit to the celebrated Dr. Willis, at Gretford in Lincoln-

shire. Concerning this matter, her account and that of Reynolds are quite irreconcilable. He never hints that she was ever really mad, or that she ever remained under Dr. Willis's charge in the asylum: but says that he went down with her, according to her singular request, when Dr. Willis treated the matter as a frolic, and recommended a holiday at the seaside; whereupon, the same day, they started off together for Lynn in Norfolk. But from a number of his letters, which she prints in her *Memoirs*, it appears that he corresponded with her while she was at Gretford, from May to August, in some year not given, but evidently 1792 or 1793, and that in August of that year he went down (she says at Topham's request) to attend her to Lynn, where they remained a month. The reason for her going to Dr. Willis's, she contends, was not mental derangement, but pecuniary difficulty. She had been very ill with milk fever, and Topham made what appeared the brilliant suggestion that by going to Gretford, she would not only improve her health, but also be perfectly secure from arrest in consequence of the report that she was under the care of the well-known specialist for insanity. She afterwards came to believe that this was merely a diabolical plot to enable Topham to get rid of her and take up with another charmer. Topham certainly did take up with another charmer, and apparently never lived with Becky again: but there is little doubt, all the same, that she was, temporarily at any rate, not responsible for her actions. Topham's account of the matter is that in consequence of her eagerness to appear in a particular part too soon after the birth of her last child, she contracted milk fever, which so disordered her brain that ever after chance and mad and momentary impulses alone governed her actions.

Dr. Willis, it may be remembered, was the somewhat irregularly qualified physician (regarded by orthodox prac-

tioners as little better than a quack), who had been called in to attend George III. in his first attack of madness in 1788. He seems to have been as much in advance of his orthodox contemporaries in medical psychology as Topham was in journalism. He said, from the first, that the King would recover; and he recommended a mild treatment in place of the barbarous severity then in vogue. When the King did recover in 1789, Willis returned to his private practice with a reputation so greatly enhanced that he was obliged to build another house near Gretford to accommodate the numerous patients who were sent to him from all parts of the country. Reynolds thus describes the place and indicates something of the Doctor's revolutionary methods:—

'Gretford and its vicinity at that time exhibited one of the most peculiar and singular sights I ever witnessed. As the unprepared traveller approached the town he was astonished to find almost all the surrounding ploughmen, gardeners, threshers, thatchers, and other labourers, attired in black coats, white waistcoats, black silk breeches and silk stockings, and the head of each "*bien poudré, frisé, et arrangé.*" These were the Doctor's patients; and dress, neatness of person, and exercise, being the principal features of his admirable system, health and cheerfulness conjoined to aid the recovery of every sufferer attached to that most valuable asylum.'

In one of the farm-houses on this singular estate, Becky appears to have lived for several months under Willis's care. Reynolds's letters to her (printed not in his, but in her *Memoirs*), are full of inquiries after her health. In one, he urges her to remain there patiently until her health is fully established: in another he says, 'I see you are the victim of malady; for when you are free from disorder no woman on earth has so many charms': and again,—'If you returned to London, and lived in the flurry and bustle of theatres, there is great danger of your disorder returning.'

On one occasion, evidently in answer to a complaint that he had not been to see her according to promise, he writes to say that she is mistaken—‘it was Topham that promised to pay you a visit in the course of the month, not me, upon my honour’; and in letter after letter he endeavours to keep her quiet and contented with promises of an early visit. At length he says definitely—‘I can now inform you that in the course of five or six weeks you may depend on seeing me; and, if you are well, I will promise to take you a journey for a month at least. This, I think, will be a change of scene for you, and absolutely necessary for your health.’ Within the time specified, he announces that he will be with her on the following Sunday, bringing her clothes with him, and that he hopes to find her ready to start at once.

In her *Memoirs*, Becky briefly says that Reynolds, at Topham’s request, attended her to Lynn, in Norfolk, where she stayed a month. But the dramatist, in his autobiography, gives a much more detailed account of their expedition. After dining with the Doctor and a numerous company of his patients, we are told, Reynolds and Becky posted off to the place which he describes as a little village, consisting only of a lighthouse and a few small cottages, inhabited by smugglers, on the wild and desolate north-east coast of Norfolk. Being ten miles from any market town, and surrounded by a set of drinking smugglers, who might be heard snapping their pistols and practising with their cutlasses, and vowing the destruction of any spies who might interfere with their vocation, Reynolds soon began to feel particularly uncomfortable. But the lady took great delight both in the place and the people; and by her frank manners, cheerful conversation, and liberal contributions, soon made herself as popular among the savages of that barren spot as she had done amongst the beaux of London.

There, however, as at Netley Abbey, the wonder was—Who could they possibly be? Some thought they were spies; others took them for rich French refugees: and at length the lady could not resist satisfying their curiosity. One day, writes Reynolds, when she had gone out gleaning in some fields adjoining the farm-house, he went out, about the time he expected her to return, to meet her.

‘On approaching the field, I was much astonished to see the farmer, his wife, and all his dependents, and many of the neighbouring peasantry, advance towards me, bowing and curtsying with the most profound respect. The “Lady Lavinia” accompanied this grotesque and outlandish group; and to the increase of my amazement, began with much seriousness and theatrical gesture to address them in broken English. The surrounding confusion was such that I could catch nothing except the frequently repeated words “*Dauphin*” and “*Jacobin*.” But not a syllable she uttered seemed to be lost upon her awe-struck auditors, who continued to approach towards me with ever lower and more awkward obeisances; when, the farmer advancing before the others, motioned them to keep back, and then falling on his knees, he hastened to disburthen his brain by exclaiming in a voice of thunder—“Dang the Jacobites!—Long live the *Dolphin*!”’

His companion, smothering her laughter, hastened to inform him, aside, that she had confided to these simple people, with the strictest injunctions to secrecy, that they two had only just escaped from France, and were no less exalted personages than Marie Antoinette and the Dauphin! That, with the aid of her beauty, and elegant appearance, and fanciful dress, and assumed broken English, she should have succeeded in persuading those artless countrymen that she was the Queen of France, did not greatly surprise Reynolds; but he says he never thought to find yokel so simple as to be induced to believe, by any persuasion whatever, that the like of him could possibly be the youthful Dauphin. However, the awe-struck peasants,

following the example of the enthusiastic farmer, pressed forward to touch the hem of his garment, or kiss the tip of his finger; and for the remainder of the evening he enjoyed the jest as keenly as did the fair perpetrator thereof. But the next day they found themselves surrounded by all the population of the place when they went out for a walk, and presently a drunken strolling manager from a barn ten miles distant came up and implored, not a 'bespeak,' but a 'Royal Command.' This showed how rapidly the story was spreading; and foreseeing that the first rational person who heard it would expose its absurdity, and involve them in what might be very serious trouble, they determined to quit the place quietly that very night, in order, as he expresses it, that by a voluntary abdication they might avoid a forcible dethronement. As an actress, Reynolds remarks, Becky possessed considerable comic talent, and, in some parts, shone unrivalled; but he thinks that she displayed even more humour in real life than in its fictitious representation on the stage. Many years afterwards, when looking through an old dusty common-place book of his own, he found the following reference, in the handwriting of his fair friend, to the state of her mind during the *four* years of their intimacy:—'I am, and have been, during the last *four years*, the most unhappy woman living. Calais, April 1st 1792.' At first he was rather shocked; but on further consideration he concluded it was only her eccentric way of assuring him that if he believed this he must be an April fool!

After leaving Lynn, she went to Thaydon, in Essex, where her children were living under the care of her mother. She says that after staying there a week, she took the children with her to Gretford to show them to Dr. Willis. The doctor was away from home, but his son, who was in charge of the asylum, knowing that she had previously been under

treatment there, took it for granted that she was still mad, and, sending the children away in charge of their governess, refused to let her leave the place. But she did not remain very long. Before the children left, she had secretly given one of them a letter to post to a Miss Hemit in London; and immediately on receipt of this, that friend posted off to Greford. Her story is that Dr. Willis at once admitted that she was not mad, although she was 'the most violent, outrageous woman he had ever seen'; and that he allowed Miss Hemit to take her away. However this may be, she did get away, and went with Miss Hemit to Chelsea. But before the lapse of many days a creditor discovered her retreat, and she once more found herself in the King's Bench. Topham wrote to Becky's mother saying: 'In regard to poor Mrs. Wells, she will of course be taken out on a proper certification of her lunacy to the Lord Chancellor, which I am putting in a proper train. Of her madness there is not now a doubt; and she is better even where she is than in society, to alarm and distract everybody she sees. Miss Hemit, who got her away clandestinely from Dr. Willis's, meets with her due reward.' From which we may presume that Miss Hemit was in the King's Bench likewise. So far as we can gather from the *Memoirs*, however, she got out of prison without any aid from the Lord Chancellor; and went off to Dublin to fulfil an engagement she had made with Daly. But before she had been in Dublin a week she was arrested for debt; and although the money was immediately paid by a Mr. Woodmason, to whom she had letters, she apparently never acted for Daly, but instantly returned to England.

It is impossible to follow the confused accounts of her various arrests, mostly due, as she asserts again and again, to the difficulties she got into through the borrowing which she had done for the sake of her brother-in-law. On one occasion, hearing that her sister had arrived from India, she

assumed that her debts would at once be paid, and rushed up to London, only to find that her sister had brought no money for that purpose, and to get herself once more arrested and lodged in the King's Bench. The few months which she spent in prison at this time were rendered as agreeable as possible, she informs us, by the attention of a Captain Blackwood, who, when the time came for him to leave, paid the £1500 necessary to liberate her also. She then went to live with him in a cottage at Merton ; but when he was gazetted Major, and ordered to join his regiment in the West Indies, though he pressed her to accompany him, she refused 'out of respect to my children.' Shortly afterwards, being up in London one day for the purpose of seeing Frederick Reynolds's play *How to get rich*, a man who had sat next to her in her box informed her as she was preparing to go out that he had abstained from spoiling her enjoyment of the performance, but must now do his duty in arresting her ; once more, she exclaims, on account of that precious brother-in-law. This time she was lodged in the Fleet, and there she met and married Joseph Sumbel.

Sumbel was a very wealthy young Jew, whose father was, or had been, prime minister to the Emperor of Morocco. He had been committed to prison for contempt of Court, having refused to make some arrangement with his brother about a disputed inheritance. He came into the Fleet in all the pomp and splendour of an Eastern monarch, attended by a large number of Moorish servants, and, of course, attracted great attention. Becky and another lady had been spectators of his arrival from a gallery, and Sumbel had not failed to observe her ; for in the course of a few days she received an invitation to dine with him, and to bring with her any ladies she thought proper. Sumbel was speedily captivated, and after a short interval proposed marriage. Becky was very desirous to accept the proposal, but there was an

awkward difficulty in the way; for she believed her husband to be still living, although she had neither seen nor heard from him for twenty years. Legal advice was taken; and she found that the only way to ensure the validity of this marriage would be for her to turn Jewess; which she accordingly did; and then she and Sumbel were married according to the rites of the Jewish synagogue. The *Morning Post* of October 16th, 1797, thus reported what it called this 'extraordinary marriage.'

'On Thursday evening last the marriage ceremony in the Jewish style was performed in the Fleet, uniting Mrs. Wells, late of Covent Garden theatre, to Mr. Sumbel, a Moorish Jew, detained for debt in that prison. The bridegroom was richly dressed in white satin and a splendid turban with a white feather: the bride, who is now converted to a Jewess, was also attired in white satin, and her head dressed in an elegant style, with a large plume of white feathers. Mr. Sumbel's brother assisted at the ceremony, dressed in pink satin and a rich turban and feather. The apartment was brilliantly illuminated with variegated lamps, according to the custom of the Jews. The rest of the company who attended were Jews, in their common habiliments—as *old-clothesmen*. But with the exception of the guests, everything had the appearance of Eastern grandeur.'

This is presumably a faithful account, seeing that the only point Mr. Sumbel thought it necessary to correct in a letter to the editor was that he was not confined in the Fleet for debt but only for contempt of Court. Becky says that four rooms in the Fleet were lighted up, and the marriage festivities, which lasted for a week, cost £500. A fortnight after their marriage she prevailed upon her husband to compromise with his brother by giving him £20,000, and as soon as he had done this, they were both liberated. But Becky, like some other persons in our own time, was deeply grieved to hear it said that she had changed her religion from unworthy motives, for the sake of making an

advantageous marriage, or merely to indulge her love of eccentricity; and on October 20th she addressed the following letter to the *Morning Post* :—

‘SIR,—In your paper of Thursday last it was said—“Mrs. Wells was always an *odd genius*, and her becoming a Jewess greatly gratifies her passion for eccentricity.” In answer to this, I beg the favour to insist in your paper that *it is not* any passion for *eccentricity* that has induced me to embrace the *Israelitish religion*—it is *studying* and *examining*, with *great care and attention*, the Old Testament that has influenced my conduct. Excuse me for giving you the trouble, but I beg you will insert the following passage from that book :—

“Thus saith the Lord of Hosts : In those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold out of *all the languages of the nations*, even shall take hold of the *skirt of a Jew*, saying, we will go with *you*, for we have heard that God is with you.”—Zachariah, ch. viii. verse 23.

‘By giving the above a place you will much oblige,

Your humble servant,

LEAH SUMBEL.

(*late Mary Wells*).’

They took a house first in Orchard Street, Portman Square, in order to be near the Turkish Ambassador, and afterwards a larger one in Pall Mall, next door to the Duke of Gloucester. But Becky soon found that the life of the spouse of an Eastern magnate had grave drawbacks. So great was Sumbel’s jealousy that if she happened to look anywhere but on the stage when he took her to the theatre, he would knock her down as soon as they got home. And she complains bitterly that—

‘Though the diamonds I wore, of immense value, were allowed me on state days and bonfire nights, on my return home they were taken from me (not in the most delicate manner) and committed to the care of the iron chest. I was, upon no pretence whatever, allowed to see them except in his presence; and as to money, I was never suffered to receive even a shilling in my pocket for fear I should run away.’

One day, the Moor would express the most extravagant fondness for her; the next day, perhaps, he would beat or otherwise ill-use her. Nor was his violence confined to his wife. For some little time they lived as lodgers in a small cottage near Hyde, out of fear of a prosecution for an assault he had committed on somebody else. To relieve the monotony of this life for him, and at the same time gratify her maternal instincts, she prevailed on him to make a tour into Yorkshire, so that she might pay a visit to her children. As he was afraid of being heavily fined, if not imprisoned, on account of the assault, they set out in a one-horse chaise in order not to attract attention. But without his usual magnificent retinue, Sumbel was more than usually sullen, restless, and impatient. He greatly disliked having to wear clothes of European fashion, as they did not show off the graces of his person; and his only consolation was to unpack his trunk at every inn they stayed at, so that he might sit cross-legged, decked out in all his oriental splendour, for the admiration of landlords and servants. Becky gives a long account of her troubles on this journey: how, if an inn-keeper happened to touch her hand in assisting her to alight from the chaise, Sumbel would storm at the profanation of touching a Moorish wife; how, if a servant rode too near the carriage, or looked at her, he swore at the man and threatened to knock him down; and how, in consequence of his dilatoriness, and frequent turnings out of the route, she at length set off by herself, without a cloak and dressed only in a muslin gown, though it was the middle of winter, with only two guineas in her pocket, to get to her children at Wold cottage. At length she reached the place, where she stayed one night only, saw her children, and also 'the father of my children,' and then returned to her husband at Stamford, after some ludicrous but most uncomfortable adventures in consequence of being without money. At

Stamford, Sumbel was introduced to her mother and children; but after behaving in a most amiable manner for a while, he suddenly broke out into fearful violence because she went out for a walk with one of her daughters, unattended by her mother or a servant; and Becky left him for a short time to recover his temper by himself. Then they returned to London; and for one whole week, she remarks, they lived in the most perfect harmony, 'nothing happening to ruffle us except one or two of the servants being occasionally knocked down.' But after this calm there soon came a storm. Sumbel had determined to return to Morocco, where he expected to succeed his father as prime minister. He laid out large sums of money in presents, including a quantity (£20,000 worth, she says) of brass cannon; and devoted a good deal of time to practising with her in the house in Pall Mall the various oriental ceremonies which they would have to go through on reaching Mogadore. When all was ready, she began to waver; and he determined to get her away by a ruse. She and a lady friend were invited to visit a ship lying in the river; but while Sumbel and the captain were carousing in the cabin, the captain's wife indiscreetly let out that the ship had been engaged by Sumbel, and was just on the point of sailing for Mogadore. Becky instantly got into a boat that had just come alongside with some provisions, and persuaded a boy who was in charge of it to row her ashore. Of course Sumbel was furious. He bought a case of pistols, threatened both to shoot her and make away with himself; and, as she declares, one day actually did fire one of the pistols at her as she lay in bed. But she escaped from the house, and had her husband brought up at Bow Street and bound over to keep the peace; after which she took lodgings in Covent Garden, and, in spite of letters pleading for forgiveness and expressing the most extravagant affection, refused to enter

his doors again. Finding that he could not compel her to return, Sumbel first endeavoured to get her shut up in a madhouse at Hoxton; and then, failing in that, wrote her a bill of divorce. All that he considered it necessary to do was to hand her a slip of paper on which he had written the first verse of the twenty-fourth chapter of Deuteronomy: 'When a man hath taken a wife and married her, and it come to pass that she hath no favour in his eyes because he hath found some uncleanness in her, then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.' In December 1798 the daily papers contained an announcement that—

'Mr. Sumbel, the Moorish Jew who about a year ago married Mrs. Wells, has lately stated in a public advertisement that Mrs. Wells is *not* his wife, and that he will not pay any debt she may contract. The grounds he gives are, first, that the ceremony was not a legal Jewish marriage; secondly, that Mrs. Wells was not capable of becoming a Jewess, without which no marriage could take place; and thirdly, that she has broken the Sabbath and the Holy Feast, by running away from Mr. Sumbel in a post-chaise, and eating *forbidden fruit*—namely, *pork griskin* and *rabbits*.'

Leah Sumbel thereupon sent a paragraph to all the papers, in which she stated that, unfortunately, she had been duly married to the said Joseph Sumbel, but, in consequence of his wicked and inhuman treatment had been forced to swear the peace against him, and that she now proposes to obtain a divorce and maintenance. She begs leave to say that although she did set off in a post-chaise from Stamford, she was then accompanied by her mother and her youngest daughter, and she was forced to do so because her life was at that time in danger from Mr. Sumbel's violence. She has ten witnesses to the marriage; and she went through every ceremony necessary to make her a Jewess before the nuptials were performed. As to the other matter—'Mr.

Sumbel himself eats pork, and even rabbits, which shocked Mrs. Sumbel much.' Sumbel refused to pay the rent of the house in Pall Mall on the ground that *she* had taken it; but when the landlord promptly sued for the amount, although Sumbel's counsel tried to complicate matters by making him out to be, not a Jew, but a Mohammedan, there was a verdict for the plaintiff. He was determined not to pay; and, having already had experience of the Fleet prison, he at once drew out all the money at his bankers, hurriedly procured a passport from the Duke of Portland, and set sail for Denmark within a few hours. Becky never saw him or heard from him again. But she says,—

'I have since learned from a gentleman that he went to Altona in Denmark, where he built a large street at his own expense; and that, for the last years of his life, his sole amusement was fishing; but the place where he enjoyed that amusement was rather singular. He had a very long room built for the purpose, in which was a large reservoir of water that contained fish of different descriptions; and he would sit whole days angling in it. If the fish did not bite quick enough to suit his Moorish temper, the water was let off, and they were beaten to pieces with a large stick.'

Becky opines that if the rest of the Moors are of his disposition, they must be very unhappy people; but it is rather singular that she did not see he was as mad as a March hare, and that, by the aid of the Lord Chancellor, she might have put him into a madhouse, and had provision made for herself out of his property.

Of the remaining years of her life there are only very fragmentary and confused records. As soon as Sumbel had disappeared her creditors came forward with suits against her, and she once more made acquaintance with the Fleet; being after a time liberated through the kindness of a gentleman, whose name is not given, but who had been a visitor at her house in the days of her prosperity. Then

her sister returned from India, and for about a year and a half, apparently during 1799 and 1800, she lived with that lady in comfort and happiness. In the summer of the latter year she went down to Brighton, to give her Imitations there under the patronage of the Duchess of Marlborough, and she remained there for some little time. But just as she was on the point of setting out for Lewes to give the Imitations there, she was arrested at the suit of a Welbeck Street milliner (*not* the brother-in-law, for a wonder, this time, she remarks), and lodged in the county gaol at Horsham until the return post brought funds from London for her release. Then she got an engagement to play for six nights for Stephen Kemble at Newcastle; and although she injured one of her legs by falling over a scuttle on the sailing smack which took her there, she managed, after a short period of rest, to play *Isabella*, and to give her Imitations. But at this place the latter did not prove a success. She was continually interrupted, and at length a man, 'who from his appearance seemed to have just made his escape from a coal-mine,' called out from the gallery in a stentorian voice—'Who is that you are imitating now?' This was too much for Becky; her irritable temper burst forth, and after replying with withering emphasis, 'Don't you know, Mr. coal-heaver?' she made her exit in a rage, and never afterwards appeared before an audience in that city. 'It was the only place in England,' she declares, 'where I gave my Imitations that they were not understood.' Her next resolution was to live at Scarborough, 'upon the trifling pittance allowed me,' in order that she might end her days in the neighbourhood of her children. Reynolds and other friends always speak of these daughters with great admiration. They are said to have been nearly as beautiful as their mother, and to have been reckoned the best horsewomen in Yorkshire. But Becky charges them with

the blackest ingratitude. They now lived with their father at Wold Cottage, near Thring, in the East Riding; and she set off to walk thither, a distance of sixteen miles, accompanied by her maid, and carrying her wardrobe in a small bundle. After walking about three miles she met her three girls riding horseback with a groom behind them. The eldest girl made the others ride on at a gallop with the servant, while she stopped to say they were going to Scarborough to order some ball dresses, but that if her mother would walk on some thirteen miles farther to a certain inn, they would pay her a visit on their return. After this visit, however, Topham interfered and interdicted any further communications, so that after poor Becky had wandered daily about the country till her only pair of shoes were worn off her feet, in the vain hope of catching even a distant view of her children, she at length determined to return to London. While she was living thus (apparently in 1804) at a farm-house on the Wolds, paying half a guinea a week for her board, and latterly without shoes to her feet, it was currently reported in London (of course quite without her knowledge) that she was then living under the protection of an illustrious personage at Kew. In consequence of this, when she returned she was greatly surprised to find herself warmly received by all her acquaintance. She was waited upon, she says, by people whom she would as soon have expected to call as the Great Mogul or the Cham of Tartary. Tradespeople flocked to beg her custom, and, most mysterious thing of all, petitions for favours poured in upon her from all quarters.

‘Going one day into a jeweller’s shop about some trifle, the man received me with the most marked politeness, and pressed me to take a pair of diamond earrings of great value. I assured him I should never be able to pay for them, when with a significant nod and insignificant grin, to which I had lately been so accustomed, he assured me I might command all in his shop if I pleased.’

At last the mystery was solved by her discovery that a person whose features somewhat resembled hers had assumed her name, and was living near the royal residence at Kew. Her brother-in-law, 'now,' for some reason unspecified, stopped the allowance of a guinea a week which he had been induced to make by way of repaying his old debt to her; and in order to make a little money she determined to write her own *Memoirs*. 'Now,' is frequently the only date that Mrs. Sumbel favours us with; but from a notice in one of the newspapers it appears that her *Memoirs* were announced as in preparation in December 1806, when she was living at No. 6 George Street, Adelphi. Many of the nobility and gentry subscribed for the book; but the author and her semi-clerical assistant must have been somewhat dilatory over their task, for the two volumes did not appear until after the lapse of five years. One of her applications for a subscription met with a rather odd response.

'Among the number to whom I applied to subscribe I sent to Dr. Moseley, as he had often been at our house, and I did not for a moment conceive that he would refuse, when, to my utter astonishment, I received a letter from him with a prescription in it. Curiosity induced me to go to an apothecary to learn what the composition was to be which I was to take in lieu of my subscription money. He informed me it was the tincture of fox-glove, and was used to lessen the circulation of the blood. . . . Whether Dr. Moseley directed a wrong letter to me—whether he thought *subscription* and *prescription* were synonymous terms—or whether he conceived one of his prescriptions would cure anything (even an empty pocket), I do not know, for I never thought it worth while to send to him to enquire.'

But if she thought that subscriptions would be forthcoming in sufficient amount to support her while she composed the book, she must have been grievously disappointed. In a short time she was obliged to apply to the Theatrical Fund for relief (which was at once granted her); and, by

way of a further subsidy, she determined on getting up a play, for the performance of which Colman generously lent her, for one night, the Haymarket Theatre. A Mr. Johnson undertook the management, as well as to answer for the expenses of the night; and *Jane Shore* was played for her benefit by a number of amateurs.

‘Never was there a more comic tragedy! No property-man or manager, from the time of Shakespeare, had a more arduous task. The part of Gloster was undertaken by the surgeon of a man-of-war. When the property-man brought him the dress necessary for the part, he loudly vociferated for stockings, but was informed by him he never supplied *noblemen* of *his* high rank with such things. They were at length obtained; but he was with great difficulty prevailed upon to permit the man to stuff some cloth inside them to deform his legs, as he had ever considered them well made, and had a great wish to sport them that night before the audience. Being at length dressed, the manager represented to him the necessity of having a hump on his back; but to that he would by no means consent. He said it was not the Duke of Gloster that was hump-backed, but Richard the Third; and if his messmates were to see him rigged in such a manner, he should never have any peace in the ward-room:—“See, sir,” said he to the manager, “what a figure the fellow has already made of my legs!”’

However, when these and a number of similar difficulties were at length satisfactorily settled, the play went on, and was well received. She says that the part of Alicia was very ably performed by a lady who had only been instructed for that night; that of Shore by a Mr. Howard, who went through it extremely well, and that of Belmont by another friend, who was ‘as good a performer as any independent man need be.’ The main point appears to have been gained, for there was a pretty full house, and we may presume that she made a comfortable little sum of money.

After she had arranged for the publication of her *Memoirs*, she went to Scotland in one of the Leith smacks, proposing

to give her Imitations in the Edinburgh Theatre. But Henry Siddons refused her application to perform them; and when remittances (as they had a habit of doing) failed to arrive from London, she was forced to take refuge within the precincts of Holyrood House, where debtors were protected from arrest. But it soon came to her ears that she was likely to be taken out of this insolvents' asylum by a process in Scotch law called *fugue warrant*; so she promptly made her escape by crossing the park one morning without attracting observation, and setting off to walk the four hundred miles to London. 'I assure my readers,' she writes, 'that I made the attempt.' According to this account (which it is to be presumed she inserted in the *Memoirs* as they were passing through the press), the weather was fine, and the people she met civil and obliging. She lived chiefly upon eggs obtained in the various villages she passed through, and she declares that not only were they the pleasantest meals she ever ate in her life, but 'I did them so much justice that I am positive the brood of chickens in that part of the country through which I passed cannot be very abundant next year.' On the second day of her tramp she reached Berwick-upon-Tweed, and on 'the fourth day and a half' after leaving Edinburgh she walked into Newcastle, where she gave in, and took shipping for London. She then lodged for a time in the house of a man, named Mariner, in Rider Street, St. James's; but, her money running short, Mariner had her arrested as soon as her bill amounted to the sum for which the English law at that time allowed an arrest to be made. Within three days she regained her liberty, and resolved to be even with Mr. Mariner. What she did to the man must be left to the reader's imagination; all she tells us is that—

'as soon as I was free I returned to the same lodgings to finish the week, as it had been begun by my going there on Monday

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morning. He charged for it in his bill, so that I was determined to see it out; and for the few days I remained there, I *rather* think he had reason to regret his conduct to me!

The last public appearance that we hear of her making was in 1807, when she gave her Imitations at the minor theatre in Catherine Street, Strand. The performance was highly spoken of in some of the papers, and she was, we are told, received with 'the most enraptured applause from a crowded and fashionable audience.' Latterly, her only consolation was to go to the play; and she got herself placed on the free list of Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and the Haymarket. She acknowledges many kindnesses from Michael Kelly, whose table, 'when I had not one of my own, has always been open to me.' And for some years past she has been rendered tolerably comfortable by the goodness of 'a gentleman and a female relation of his,' who appear to have been City folks living in the neighbourhood of the Royal Exchange. Before the publication of her *Memoirs* she had been re-converted to Christianity. Having gone through 'every scene of trouble which human nature is capable of bearing,' she writes, in conclusion, that she is now endeavouring to compose her mind for the inevitable end. With this object in view, she had applied to several teachers of the Gospel for advice. The dissenters rather bewildered than convinced her. She gave a fair and patient hearing to the Methodists, but they also failed to satisfy her. Then she turned to the Roman Catholics, and it was apparently by them that, 'as a repentant sinner,' she was again received into the bosom of the Christian Church. The last glimpse that we get of her exhibits no trace of this sanctimoniousness. From the time of the publication of her *Memoirs* in 1811 until 1821, she disappears from view. But in the latter year John Bernard, just returned from America, encountered her in the street leading to Westminster Bridge.

'Though old and faded, she was still buoyant and loquacious. A young, rough-looking male companion was with her, whom she instantly quitted to welcome me home. After about five minutes' conversation on past and present times, I begged not to keep her from her friend any longer. "Friend!" she replied, putting a construction on the word which I by no means intended. "He's no friend! he's my husband." It was now my turn to stare; and I inquired whether he was in the profession. She took him by the hand, and dancing up to me through the stream of coal-heavers, porters, and men of business that were passing, sang with great good-humour:

"And haven't you heard of the jolly young waterman,
That at Westminster Bridge used to ply?"

'*Vale* Becky,' adds Bernard; and for us it is *vale* likewise. For, although in John O'Keeffe's *Recollections*, published in 1826, there is a brief reference intimating that his original 'Cowslip' was then dead, we do not know what became of her in the meantime, nor when, or in what circumstances, she died.

DORA JORDAN

IF it be true, as Hazlitt asserted, that Fame, while forgetting one by one, and year by year, those who have been great lawyers, great statesmen, and great warriors in their day, has generally been particularly careful of the renown of her theatrical favourites, that trumpet-blowing goddess made one exception, at any rate, in the case of Mrs. Jordan. And it is by no means easy to see why she should have done so. For not only did Mrs. Jordan draw crowded houses for a period of something like thirty years, not only did her comedy eclipse for a time even the tragedy of Mrs. Siddons, not only was she, according to the judgment of so discriminating a critic as Leigh Hunt, the first actress of her day, and perhaps also the first of all who have at any time adorned the English stage; but in addition to all this, her private life was known to have been a curiously romantic one, and to have come to a strange, mysterious, and even tragic end. Perhaps her biographers have helped to obscure her reputation. Her *Life* by James Boaden, which appeared, in two volumes in 1831, was a confused and unsatisfactory performance. And a smaller book which appeared about the same date, and was reprinted some fifty years later, entitled *The Public and Private Life of that Celebrated Actress, Miss Bland, otherwise Mrs. Ford, or Mrs. Jordan, . . . by a Confidential Friend of the Departed*, although it was incorporated almost *in extenso* in Huish's *History of the Life and Reign of William IV.*, was a mere catch-penny publication, put together by some one who, whatever may



Dora Jordan

FROM THE ENGRAVING BY ENGLEHEART OF THE PORTRAIT BY MORLAND.

have been his source of information, had little skill in making use of his materials, but who inevitably spoiled the market for a better and more authentic memoir. From these sources, however, supplemented by some other incidental contemporary records, we may perhaps piece together as much of the history of this fascinating actress and unfortunate woman as is now ever likely to be known; unless, indeed, the following recital should induce some of the descendants of her numerous family to state the real reason for her separation from the Duke of Clarence in 1811, to give a satisfactory explanation of the poverty and exile of her later days, and to clear up the mystery which at present surrounds her end. The contemporary 'romance' (as it is called) of Mrs. Fitzherbert and George IV.—whose final separation took place in the same year as that of Mrs. Jordan from the Duke of Clarence—has recently been authoritatively elucidated, greatly to the advantage of Mrs. Fitzherbert's character; and, although the matter cannot be said to be one of any historical importance, it is certainly not fair that, merely because she was a common actress instead of a lady of good birth and position, a similar measure of justice should not be meted out to Mrs. Jordan.

'Thalia,' as Mrs. Jordan's admirers delighted to call her, was born in the neighbourhood of Waterford in 1762. Her mother was one of three daughters of the Rev. Dr. Phillips, who, one after another, took to the stage. Her father, according to one account, was a Captain Bland, whose friends disowned him on account of his marriage with an actress. The 'Confidential Friend' says that Grace Phillips eloped with this Captain Bland, by whom she had nine children; and that it was in consequence of his family's refusal of supplies that he and his wife took to the stage. The same author also asserts that the Captain's father managed to get his son's marriage invalidated, whereupon

that gallant officer abandoned his nine children and their mother, married a lady of fortune, and was subsequently promoted to a colonelcy. All that is otherwise known of him, however, is that in 1777, when his daughter was playing in Cork, the 'Captain' obtained employment as a scene-shifter in the same theatre. It was in her sixteenth year, after being employed as a milliner's assistant in Dame Street, that Dorothy, or Dora, Bland, taking the stage name of 'Miss Francis,' made her début at the Dublin theatre, as Phœbe in *As You Like It*. Her reception, if not enthusiastic, was encouraging; and Sir Jonah Barrington, who saw her act frequently at this early period, described her as joyous, animated, and droll; with a laugh that arose from her heart, and a tear that started ingenuously from her feeling; accomplishments which, together with her expressive, though not particularly beautiful face, her light, elastic form, flexible limbs, and juvenile grace of movement, made a pronounced impression on all who attended her performances. Richard Daly, manager of the Dublin theatre, took her to Waterford, where she made her first appearance in a male part; and she afterwards went to Cork, where she obtained an engagement at £1 a week, and met with general admiration. Pryce Gordon, in his *Personal Memoirs*, relates that during the course of her Cork engagement, Heaphy, the manager, offered her a benefit, but that, from want of patronage, this proved a complete failure. A party of enthusiastic young men thereupon determined that she should have another. They called for Heaphy, and when he failed to appear in answer to the summons, they obtained reinforcements from the pit, and, tearing up the benches, attacked the orchestra. On this, the manager deemed it prudent to show himself, and although he at first demurred when a spokesman expressed the wish of the audience that 'Miss Phillips' should have another benefit, yet he was in

the end, says Gordon, 'compelled to yield to the wishes of the public—*alias* a score of wild bucks, of whom I made one.' This benefit produced over £40, a sum which must just then have been very acceptable to the young lady, who not only had her family dependent on her, but had got into debt, and other worse trouble, with Daly. It was the practice of this notorious scoundrel first to get his actresses into financial difficulties by the irregularity of his payments, then to make them advances of money until they were hopelessly in his debt, and then, having got them into his power, to rely on the fear of arrest to effect their seduction. He had succeeded only too well with 'Miss Francis'; and it appears to have been mainly out of fear of him that, in July 1782, she ran away, in company with her mother, brother, and sister, from Dublin to Leeds; where they arrived in an almost penniless condition, and immediately applied to Tate Wilkinson for an engagement. Tate called at their inn, and found them, as he puts it, 'not so well accoutred' as he could have wished, both for their sakes and his own. But, as he at once recognised the mother as the Miss Phillips who had played Desdemona for him in Dublin twenty-four years previously, he was inclined to do all he could for the sake of old acquaintance. The young lady, however, appeared to him not only temporarily dejected and melancholy-looking, but without the least trait of comic powers in feature or manner. Yet, in answer to his question whether she could play tragedy, comedy, or opera, she laconically but confidently replied—'All.' In after-life she used to say that she had never seen an elderly gentleman look more astonished. The mamma, too, like other mammas, and in particular actresses' mammas, says Tate, talked so fulsomely of her daughter's merits, that he was almost disgusted, and very near giving a flat denial to any negotiations. But he withdrew for half an hour to consider

the matter, and then went back to ask her to repeat something. She pleaded incapacity at the moment, and begged for a fair trial on the boards to show whether or not she merited an engagement. Being still undecided, Wilkinson called for a bottle of Madeira; and after a chat about Dublin and other ordinary matters, at length prevailed on her to speak a few lines from the part of Calista in *The Fair Penitent*. Her voice so surprised and pleased him that he at once offered her an engagement at fifteen shillings a week; and a few days later she made her appearance as Calista in that play. The result was eminently satisfactory—at least to Wilkinson. In the course of the rambling but highly interesting recollections with which in after-years he filled the four volumes of his *Wandering Patentee*, Wilkinson says:—

‘I was not only charmed, but the public also—and still more at what I feared would spoil the whole, the absurdity of Calista, after her death, jumping forth and singing a ballad; but on she came, in a frock and a little mob cap, and sang the song with such effect that I was fascinated—for managers do not always meet with jewels, but when they do, and think the sale will turn out for their own advantage, you cannot conceive, reader, how it makes our eyes sparkle.’

She remained with Tate Wilkinson for three years, and played, not only in Leeds but throughout the York circuit, with great success; materially contributing, as he candidly admits, to fill his coffers. During one of the race weeks at York, Mr. Smith of Drury Lane was present every time she acted, and was evidently so much struck with her performance that the wily Tate secretly rejoiced that he had article'd her for a term at a moderately increased salary. While at York she also attracted the favourable notice of an elderly and eccentric critic named Cornelius Swan. He called her his adopted daughter; and although Wilkinson

says he did not act up to the character, because when he died nothing was left to her in his will, yet he gave, or advanced, between two and three hundred pounds to pay off her debt to the infamous Daly, when that scoundrel renewed his persecution of her. He also taught, or imagined that he taught, her to act. On one occasion he sat by her bedside during an illness, with Mrs. Bland's old red cloak round his neck, instructing her in Hill's character of Zara; after which he urged Wilkinson to revive that tragedy—"for really, Wilkinson," said he, 'I have given the Jordan but three lessons, and she is so adroit at receiving my instructions that I declare she repeats the character as well as Mrs. Cibber ever did; nay, let me do the Jordan justice, for I do not exceed when, with truth, I declare Jordan speaks it as well as I could myself.'

Precisely when and why Miss Bland began to describe herself as 'Mrs. Jordan' is somewhat uncertain. In John Bernard's *Retrospections of the Stage*, the author states that he once asked Tate Wilkinson the origin of this name, as he had never heard of Miss Bland being married.

"God bless you, my boy!" said Wilkinson, "I gave her that name—I was her sponsor. . . . When she thought of going to London, she thought *Miss* sounded insignificant, so she asked me to advise her a name. Why, said I, my dear, you have *crossed the water*, so I'll call you Jordan; and, by the memory of Sam! if she didn't take my joke in earnest, and call herself Jordan ever since."

This, however, is inconsistent with the foregoing story about Cornelius Swan, and also with what Tate Wilkinson elsewhere tells us in the *Wandering Patentee*. On the occasion of their first visit to York, he says, he was informed that, 'for family reasons,' his young star must not be billed either as 'Miss Francis' or as 'Miss Bland,' and that the name of Jordan was then settled upon. The only family

reason he gives, however, which is the following, would appear to call for her being billed as 'Miss Phillips.'

'At that juncture her aunt, Miss Phillips, was at York, on her death-bed. That lady had ever prided herself on family honours, being sprung from the Ap-Griffithss, the Winnys, and the Ap-Rices of Wales. She was not destitute of good qualities, but had let a fatal error sap her health. She earnestly sent to see her sister and to embrace her dear niece, whom she pronounced an honour to the blood of the Ap-Phillipss; and as she had plenty of clothes and linen (at the pawnbroker's) she bequeathed them to her beloved niece—which, under the rose, was not at that time by any means unacceptable.'

It has been suggested that Mrs. Bland at this time still had hopes of obtaining supplies from her run-away 'Captain's' family, and that his daughter was consequently fearful of offending them by putting their name on the playbills—which may be likely enough. But her biographer, Boaden, merely says that the name of 'Mrs. Jordan' was adopted as being more consonant with her manifest matronly condition. Whatever the reason, however, it seems that she was known as Mrs. Jordan during the latter part at least of her engagement with Wilkinson, and that when she went up to London in 1785 to try her fortune on the boards of Drury Lane, she was known by no other name.

Opinions varied as to Mrs. Jordan's prospects in London; and Mrs. Siddons, who saw her act at York in August 1785, is reported to have said that she was better off where she was, and should not venture on the London boards. Her first engagement at Drury Lane was a sufficiently modest one, being merely to act the second parts in tragedies wherein the leading parts were taken by Mrs. Siddons, and her salary was to be £4 a week. But from the moment of her appearance, on October 18, as Peggy in *The Country Girl*, her success was assured. Although, even then, she did not take the town by storm; as the following apprecia-

tive but by no means enthusiastic notice from the *Morning Herald* may testify :—

‘She is universally allowed to possess a figure, small perhaps, but neat and elegant, as was remarkably conspicuous when she was dressed as a boy in the third act. Her face, if not beautiful, is said by some to be pretty, and by some pleasing, intelligent, or impressive. Her voice, if not peculiarly sweet, is not harsh ; if not strong, is clear, and equal to the extent of the theatre. She has much archness, and gave every point of the dialogue with the best comic effect. She is a perfect mistress of the *jeu de théâtre*, and improved to the uttermost all the ludicrous situations with which *The Country Girl* abounds. From such premises there is and can be but one conclusion, that she is a most valuable acquisition to the public stock of innocent entertainment.’

But she advanced so rapidly in public favour, that before the end of the season her salary was tripled, she received two benefits, and had come to be looked upon as the chief support of the theatre. As soon as the Drury Lane season closed she went on tour in the provinces, and had a most enthusiastic reception. At Leeds, when she was announced to act in *The Country Girl*, the house overflowed before the play began, and seven rows of the pit were laid into the boxes. The rage with which she was then followed throughout Yorkshire was altogether unparalleled ; and her triumphal progress continued into Scotland, when Glasgow presented her with a gold medal, struck for the occasion ; and Edinburgh gave her so warm a welcome, that one night she was moved to speak to the delighted audience a bright little unintelligible poetical address of her own composition. Her next season at Drury Lane was even more successful than the first ; and she is said to have brought no less than £5000 into the theatre treasury. And it was only the prelude to a long series of similar successes, which it would be wearisome to chronicle. In a word, she had risen to the very summit of her profession ; and it may

be said that her popularity never waned during the long period of twenty-four years that she was connected with that theatre.

Perhaps some faint notion of the nature of the extraordinary fascination exercised by Mrs. Jordan may be derived from the testimony of certain eminent professional and critical contemporaries. Sir Joshua Reynolds pronounced her figure to be the neatest and most perfect in symmetry that he had ever seen; and he was enchanted with her acting, declaring that she really *was* what other performers only affected to be. John Kemble, who in 1796 played Manly in Wycherley's *Plain Dealer* to Mrs. Jordan's Fidelia, could only find expression for his feelings in a quotation from Yorick, saying: 'It may seem ridiculous enough to a torpid heart,—I could have taken her into my arms and cherished her, though it was in the open street, without blushing.' And sixteen years later, Macready, who then saw her act twice at the Leicester theatre, declared:—

'If Mrs. Siddons appeared a personification of the tragic muse, certainly all the attributes of Thalia were most joyously combined in Mrs. Jordan. With a spirit of fun that would have outlaughed Puck himself, there was a discrimination, an identity with her character, an artistic arrangement of the scene, that made all appear spontaneous and accidental, though elaborated with the greatest care. Her voice was one of the most melodious I ever heard, which she could vary by certain bass tones, that would have disturbed the gravity of a hermit; and who that heard that laugh could ever forget it? . . . so rich, so apparently irrepressible, so deliciously self-enjoying, as to be at all times irresistible.'

Of course she had her limitations; and happily no one knew them better than she did herself. High tragedy she left to Mrs. Siddons, and high comedy to Miss Farren; although, after the latter's retirement and elevation to a coronet, she was sometimes induced to play some of that actress's favourite parts. But she had neither the height

nor the skill to represent women of fashion; and instead of gracefully managing a train, for example, was very apt, with her natural alertness of action, to kick it hastily out of the way. In the youthful and tender heroines of serious plays, however, she was particularly enchanting; and Sir Joshua Reynolds declared that she did as much by the music of her melancholy as by the music of her laugh. Charles Lamb held a similar opinion; and in his essay 'On Some of the Old Actors,' suggested by the names on an old playbill of *Twelfth Night* that he had happened to preserve, there occurs a passage of characteristically fine and subtle appreciation, which effectually disposes of the contention occasionally made that Mrs. Jordan only attained real excellence in parts such as 'Peggy,' or 'Little Pickle,' in which she could romp it away with a jump and a laugh.

'Those who have only seen Mrs. Jordan within the last ten or fifteen years [he writes] can have no adequate notion of her performances of such parts as Ophelia; Helena in *All's Well that Ends Well*; and Viola in this play. Her voice had latterly acquired a coarseness, which suited well enough with her Nells and Hoydens, but in those days it sank, with her steady, melting eye, into the heart. Her joyous parts—in which her memory now chiefly lives—in her youth were outdone by her plaintive ones. There is no giving an account how she delivered the disguised story of her love for Orsino. It was no set speech that she had foreseen, so as to weave it into an harmonious period, line necessarily following line, to make up the music—yet I have heard it so spoken, or rather *read*, not without its grace and beauty—but, when she had declared her sister's history to be a "blank," and that she "never told her love," there was a pause, as if the story had ended—and then the image of the "worm in the bud" came up as a new suggestion—and the heightened image of "Patience" still followed after that, as by some growing (and not mechanical) process, thought springing up after thought, I would almost say, as they were watered by her tears. . . . She used no rhetoric in her passion; or it was Nature's own rhetoric, most legitimate then, when it seemed altogether without rule or law.'

It was certainly, however, as a comic actress that Mrs. Jordan was, not only unrivalled, but absolutely unapproached. No other actress ever caused so much and such genuine laughter. Her own intense enjoyment of a ludicrous thing was so contagious that, as Macready said, it would have broken down the conventional serenity of Lord Chesterfield himself. Hazlitt declared, with all his characteristic gusto, that she was a child of Nature, whose voice was a cordial to the heart, 'rich, full, like the luscious juice of the ripe grape,' to hear whose laugh was to drink nectar, whose talk was 'far above singing,' and whose singing was like the twang of Cupid's bow. And Leigh Hunt gave the following account of the unique nature of her laughter, which may pair off with Charles Lamb's analysis of her pathetic power:—

'Her laughter is the happiest and most natural on the stage; if she is to laugh in the middle of a speech, it does not separate itself so abruptly from her words as with most of our performers. . . . Her laughter intermingles itself with her words as fresh ideas afford her fresh merriment; she does not so much indulge as she seems unable to help it; it increases, it lessens, with her fancy; and when you expect it no longer, according to the usual habits of the stage, it sparkles forth at little intervals as recollection revives it, like flame from half-smothered embers. This is the laughter of the feelings; and it is this predominance of heart in all she says and does that renders her the most delightful actress in the Donna Violante of *The Wonder*, the Clara of *Matrimony*, and in twenty other characters.'

It was perhaps unfortunate that Mrs. Jordan happened to be so fine a 'breeches figure'; and her constant representation of male parts may, as Leigh Hunt held, have tended to spoil her for the higher comedy; but the consensus of testimony unquestionably bears out his final verdict that, as a performer who united great comic powers with much serious feeling, she was not only the first actress of her day, but, 'as

it appears to me, from the descriptions we have of former actresses, the first that has adorned our stage.' To place Mrs. Jordan on a level with Mrs. Siddons may perhaps appear to the modern reader, who is much more familiar with the name of the latter than of the former, somewhat extravagant; and it may be well to adduce the testimony of James Boaden, who, besides, being an admirer and intimate friend, was the biographer of both these ladies. It is a singular circumstance that his most enthusiastic eulogy of Mrs. Jordan occurs in his *Life of Mrs. Siddons*. After enlarging on the 'prodigious' attraction of the latter, whose tragedy had for three seasons consistently brought in greater receipts than the whole comic strength of Drury Lane combined, and when there seemed no chance whatever that any single name in comedy should ever divide the town with her, he says that the situation was entirely altered by the appearance, of a young, unpatronised actress from the York company.

'The reader sees that I can only allude to Mrs. Jordan. Certainly no lady in my time was ever so decidedly marked out for comic delight. She seemed as if expressly formed to dry up the tears which tragedy had so long excited, and balance the account between the dramatic sisters, which Garrick alone succeeded to do in his own single person. . . .

'The mark of this great actress had been made upon all the little caresses of female artifice that inspire confidence because they presume ingenuousness; all those sportive enjoyments of bounding youth and whim and eccentricity; things that are usually done laughing, and provoke the laugh of unavoidable sympathy. Her sphere of observation had for the most part been in the country, and *The Country Girl*, therefore, became her own, in its innocence or its wantonness, its moodiness under restraint, or its elastic movement when free. Her imagination teemed with the notions of such a being, and the gestures with which what she said was accompanied, spoke a language infinitely more suggestive than words—the latter could give no more than the meaning of her

mind, the former interpreted for the whole being. She did not rise to the point where comedy attains the dignity of moral satire, but humour was her own in all its boundless diversity.

'She had no reserve whatever of modest shyness to prevent her from giving the fullest effect to the flights of her fancy. She drove everything home to the mark, and the visible enjoyment of her own power added sensibly to its effect upon others. Of her beautiful compact figure she had the most captivating use; its spring, its wild activity, its quickness of turn. She made a grand deposit of her tucker, and her bosom concealed everything but its own charms. The redundant curls of her hair, half showing and half concealing the archness of her physiognomy, added to a playfulness which, even as she advanced in life, could not seem otherwise than natural and delightful. But all this would have been inadequate to her pre-eminence without that bewitching voice which blurted out the tones of vulgar enjoyment, or spleen, or resistance, so as to render even coarseness pleasing, or flowed in the sprightly measures of a joy so exhilarating as to dispel dulness in an instant: she crowned all this by a laugh so rich and so provoking, an expression of face so brilliant, and that seemed never to tire in giving pleasure, that the sight of her was a general signal for the most unrestrained delight.'

But we must now pass from the front of the footlights, in order to get a glimpse or two of what went on behind the scenes. It has been already mentioned that the infamous Daly took advantage of the young actress before she had reached her twenty-first year. A daughter, who was the result of this connection, was, up to the time of her marriage to a Mr. Alsop, known as Miss Jordan. In 1787, when at the age of twenty-five and at the summit of her profession, Mrs. Jordan suddenly became known as Mrs. Ford, having, it was presumed, married Richard Ford, 'a barrister by profession, and a strolling player by necessity.' She had three children by Ford, all daughters; and for several years was not only believed to be Ford's legal wife, but looked upon as a pattern of matronly excellence. Her 'Confidential Friend' asserts that Ford solemnly promised to marry her,

but induced her to defer the ceremony in order not to offend his father, on whom he was dependent, and from whom he had great expectations. Be this as it may, they appear to have lived very comfortably together, keeping their carriage, and an establishment at the rate of something like two thousand a year,—needless to say, entirely out of her earnings. Then, in 1790, the Duke of Clarence (afterwards William IV.), who had just come home from active service in the Navy, fell in love with the fascinating actress, and proposed to make her his mistress. Boaden says that Mrs. Jordan knew the value of the sanctions of law and religion as well as anybody; and that if Mr. Ford would have taken that one step further which she then urged him to do, and which the Duke *could* not take, she would certainly have married the barrister rather than become the mistress of the Prince. She told him distinctly, says her biographer and friend, that her mind was made up at least on one point, viz. :—that if she must choose between offers of ‘protection,’ she should certainly choose that which promised the fairest; but that if he could think her worthy of being his *wife*, no temptations whatever would be strong enough to detach her from him and her duties. Mr. Ford, however, says Boaden, resigned her with legal composure; and she accepted the terms held out by the Duke. The Rev. William Wright, in his *Life and Reign of William IV.*, puts a rather different complexion on this story, at least so far as one of the parties is concerned. According to him, Ford transferred Mrs. Jordan to the Duke in the manner of a man who puts up his wife for sale to the highest bidder with a halter about her neck. Mr. Wright asserts most unequivocally that when Mrs. Jordan offered to give up all thought of the Duke if only Ford would marry her, that worthless person had already made an infamous bargain in the matter with the Duke; and that in addition to other

considerations for resigning the mother of his three children, he obtained a share in Drury Lane Theatre, and (later on) a police magistracy at Shadwell, from which he was subsequently promoted to Bow Street and a knighthood. Boaden does not appear to have known of this; but he seems to have held Ford in considerable contempt, remarking that he had asked men of his own standing at the Bar and on the Bench for their recollections of this mirror of magistracy and knighthood, only to find that 'he had impressed their minds as a fly would their hands—they had just shaken it and it was gone.' It may be mentioned, in passing, that Ford subsequently married a Miss Booth,—with whom he is said to have got some property. The public, however, knowing nothing of all this, regarded Ford as an injured and deserted man, and became extremely solicitous about his children. Some persons, who had axes of their own to grind, also spread about the report that Mrs. Jordan had allowed the solicitations of a Prince to withdraw her from the theatre. This moved her to write to the papers in November 1790, saying that though she had submitted in silence to a good deal of abuse relating to matters in which she considered the public had no concern, now that she had been attacked in the conduct of her profession, she felt called upon to reply. In the first place, then, it was totally untrue that she had absented herself from the theatre from any other cause than illness; and, secondly, her theatrical earnings were the only income she possessed, or meant to possess, and the half of that she had already settled upon her children. The next time she appeared at the theatre, however, the audience was evidently hostile, and inclined to be riotous; whereupon she courageously advanced to the footlights, and made a little speech, throwing herself on their generosity and protection in such a manner as to completely re-establish herself in the popular favour.

It must be remembered that during the whole twenty years of Mrs. Jordan's connection with the Duke of Clarence he was a person of no political importance, as it was not until the death of the Duke of York in 1827 that he became heir to the crown. He had been appointed Ranger of Bushy Park; and he resided there with Mrs. Jordan, devoting himself almost entirely to the affectionate care of the numerous children she bore him. She was installed as the mistress of his household; and when not absent in the exercise of her profession, took the head of his dinner-table, and was treated by himself and his visitors as though she were his wife. Her daughter by Daly, as well as her three daughters by Ford, who all bore the name of Jordan, lived with her at Bushy, and appear to have been treated by the Duke almost as affectionately as if they had been his own. It is said that he allowed her £1,000 a year. The 'Confidential Friend' relates that one day George III. paternally admonished him on such extravagance. 'Hey, hey,' said the old King, 'What's this?—What's this? You keep an actress—keep an actress, they say.'—'Yes, sir.'—'Ah, well, well; how much do you give her, eh?'—'A thousand a year, sir.'—'A thousand! a thousand! too much, too much! Five hundred quite enough, quite enough!' The story goes on that the Duke, after pondering over the matter, wrote a letter to Mrs. Jordan suggesting the reduction in the allowance which his father had recommended; and that all he received from her by way of answer was a strip torn off from the bottom of a playbill bearing the words 'no money returned after the rising of the curtain.' But this story is most probably apocryphal. Indeed, subsequent events point very strongly to the conclusion that Mrs. Jordan's earnings as an actress—which, if not quite so enormous as some of her admirers would make out, certainly ran into some thousands a year—were to a very large extent placed at the

disposal of His Royal Highness. There seems to have been some public suspicion of this from the first; for, amongst the numerous paragraphs in the newspapers respecting the new 'Royal Alliance,' we not only find such gems of journalistic wit as the following:—

'A favourite actress, if Old Goody Rumour is to be trusted, has thought proper to put herself under the protection of a *distinguished sailor*, who *dropped anchor* before her last summer at Richmond. As she resolutely held out, however, at that time, though the assault was vigorously pushed, perhaps this is only a flying report; and the lady thinks there is more security in a private *Ford* than in the open sea';

or—

'*Little Pickle's* assumed character of the *Tar* was a prelude only to her future nautical fame; for though pressed into the service, she has consented, we find, to be close moored under the guns of the *Royal Commodore*';

or—

'A correspondent observes that the *Jordan*, which was only FORD-able some time ago, is now capable of bearing a *first-rate*!'; but in November 1791 one of the morning papers boldly said—

'The connection between *Little Pickle* and her new FRIEND has been paragraphed in every public shape, and unless something extraordinary should ever occur, may now be dropped. We have only to add that, as *Banker to Her Highness*, he actually received her *week's salary* from the *Treasurer* on Saturday last!!!'

And a few days later, a writer who signed himself 'Pindar Junr.,' ventured to print the following epigram—

'ON A CERTAIN PERSON'S RECEIVING A THEATRICAL SALARY.'

'As *Jordan's* high and mighty squire
Her play-house profits deigns to skim,
Some folks audaciously enquire
If he keeps *her*, or *she* keeps *him*!'

From time to time reports became current that Mrs. Jordan was about to retire from the stage, in deference to

the wishes of her exalted friend; but, except for such occasional absences as were necessitated by the cares of maternity, and for one longer period between 1806 and 1808, that threatened retirement never took effect; and we may very well doubt whether it was ever really intended. The Duke used to read proffered plays to see whether they contained parts likely to be suitable (and therefore profitable) to her; and we may shrewdly suspect that certain little items of information with which she favoured other friends in her letters from Bushy—such as, ‘I returned here on the 7th inst. after a very fatiguing though very prosperous *cruise* of five weeks’; or, ‘I have made two most lucrative trips since I saw you’—were by no means matters of indifference to her special Friend, the impecunious Ranger of Bushy Park. However, both parties appear to have been perfectly satisfied with their bargain. Boaden says that ‘whoever had the happiness of seeing them together at Bushy, saw them surrounded by a family rarely excelled for personal and mental grace; they saw their happy mother an honoured wife in everything but the legal title; and uniformly spoke of the establishment at Bushy as one of the most enviable that had ever presented itself to their scrutiny.’ Greville noted in his Diary that the Duke seemed to live entirely with and for his children, whom he brought up with very tender affection. And from the tone of several letters to Sir Hugh Christian, which are to be found in the *Romantic Annals of a Naval Family* it is apparent that he was equally devoted to Mrs. Jordan. On one occasion, he apologises for not answering a letter sooner because he has been in attendance on Mrs. Jordan, who has been very ill indeed; another time, he begs his correspondent to accept Mrs. Jordan’s thanks as well as his own for some proffered civility; and again, in acknowledging kind inquiries after Mrs. Jordan’s health, he writes—

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‘The papers have on this occasion told the truth, for she was last week for some hours in danger ; but now, thank God, she is much better, and I hope in a fair way of perfect recovery. It is my present intention to set out on the 23rd inst. for the seaside, in order that Mrs. Jordan may bathe for six weeks. As the place we mean to go to is no great distance from the Isle of Wight, and if you have nothing better to do, I shall be very happy to see you there, and Mrs. Jordan has likewise desired me to say as much.’

In fact, the Duke appears to have treated her, and insisted on his friends treating her, precisely as if she had been his Duchess. And it is an extraordinary circumstance that, in spite of her origin and upbringing, Mrs. Jordan seems to have risen to the occasion. Sir Jonah Barrington, one of the Judges of the High Court of Admiralty in Ireland, who was a friend of the Duke, and whose son was brought up with the Duke’s family at Bushy, bears emphatic testimony on this point. ‘I have seen this accomplished woman,’ he says, ‘in the midst of one of the finest families in England, surrounded by splendour, beloved, respected, and treated with all the deference paid to a member of high life;’ and ‘never did I find in any character a more complete concentration of every quality that should distinguish a mother, a friend, and a gentlewoman.’ She seldom spoke much in company, particularly in large assemblies ; but when she did, she spoke well ; and Barrington says that, making no exertion to appear distinguished, she became all the more so by the absence of effort, ‘the performer being wholly merged in the gentlewoman.’

In the *Courier* of August 23, 1806, the public obtained a glimpse of the popular actress as she appeared when playing the rôle of Duchess in private life. August 22 was the Duke’s birthday, who in 1806 completed his forty-first year, and, for some reason, celebrated the occasion not merely by giving a buck to his tradesmen, who, of course, put up loyal

illuminations in the evening as usual, but by giving a party to the Prince of Wales and a number of other distinguished persons, which the newspaper mentioned described in the following glowing terms:—

‘The Duke of Clarence’s birthday was celebrated with much splendour in Bushy Park on Thursday. The grand hall was entirely new fitted up with bronze pilasters, and various marble imitations;—the ceiling was correctly clouded, and the whole illuminated with some brilliant patent lamps, suspended from a beautiful eagle. The dining-room, in the right wing, was fitted up in a modern style, with new elegant lamps at the different entrances. The pleasure-ground was disposed for the occasion, and the servants had new liveries. In the morning, the Duke of York’s and Kent’s bands arrived in caravans; after dressing themselves and dining, they went into the pleasure-grounds, and played alternately some charming pieces. The Duke of Kent’s played some of the choruses and movements from Haydn’s Oratorio of the CREATION, arranged by command of his Royal Highness for a band of wind instruments. About five o’clock the Prince of Wales, the Dukes of York, Kent, Sussex, and Cambridge, Colonel Paget, etc., arrived from reviewing the German Legion. After they had dressed for dinner, they walked in the pleasure-grounds, accompanied by the Lord Chancellor, Earl and Countess of Athlone and Daughter, Lord Leicester, Baron Hotham and Lady, Baron Eden, the Attorney General, Colonel Paget and Mr. Millon, Serjeant Marshall, and a number of other persons. At seven o’clock the second bell announced the dinner, when the Prince of Wales took Mrs. Jordan by the hand, led her into the dining-room, and seated her at the top of the table. The Prince took his seat at her right hand, and the Duke of York at her left, the Duke of Cambridge sat next to the Prince, the Duke of Kent next to the Duke of York, and the Lord Chancellor next to his Royal Highness. The Duke of Clarence sat at the foot of the table. It is hardly necessary to state that the table was sumptuously covered with everything the season could afford. The bands played on the lawn, close to the dining-room window. The populace were permitted to enter the pleasure-grounds to behold the royal banquet, while the presence of Messrs. Townsend, Sayers, and Macmann preserved the most correct decorum. The Duke’s numerous family were intro-

duced, and admired by the Prince, the royal Dukes, and the whole company ; an infant in arms, with a most beautiful white head of hair, was brought into the dining-room by the nursery maid. After dinner, the Prince gave "The Duke of Clarence," which was drunk with three times three ; the Duke then gave "The King," which was drunk in a solemn manner. A discharge of cannon from the lawn followed "The Queen and Princesses," "The Duke of York and the Army." His Royal Highness's band then struck up his celebrated march.'

What the 'populace,' whose 'most correct decorum' may have been due to the presence of the Bow Street runners, secretly thought about all this, we have no means of knowing. But it does not seem to have occurred to the newspapers that their royal princes were not also observing the most correct decorum. William Cobbett alone gave vent to a growl in his *Political Register*. He affected to believe that the *Courier* and other newspapers had been hoaxed. He *could* not believe, he said, that 'Mother Jordan,' who, the last time he saw her (in her character of Nell Jobson), cost him eighteenpence, had been taken by the hand and seated at the head of the Duke's table by the Prince of Wales. And seeing that such false and malicious reports were calculated to do great harm to the royal family, he ironically invited the Prince of Wales or one of his royal brothers to contradict the whole account in the columns of his *Register*, which he would willingly throw open to them for the purpose.

Mrs. Jordan's children by the Duke of Clarence were five sons and five daughters, all of whom took the name of Fitzclarence. Soon after his accession to the throne, William IV. created the eldest son Earl of Munster, and gave to all the others the rank and precedence of younger sons and daughters of a marquis. The eldest son committed suicide ; and two of the others distinguished themselves (in other ways) sufficiently to obtain a place in the *Dictionary*

of *National Biography*; but, as their subsequent history is no part of the present story, it may be sufficient to give a mere list of the family.

George Augustus Frederick Fitzclarence, created Earl of Munster in 1831.

Henry Fitzclarence, died, a captain, in India, in 1817.

Lord Frederick Fitzclarence, Lieut.-General, and Colonel of 36th Foot.

Lord Adolphus Fitzclarence, Commander of the Royal Yacht, etc.

Lord Augustus Fitzclarence, Rector of Mapledurham, chaplain to the King.

Lady Sophia Fitzclarence, married Lord De L'Isle and Dudley in 1825.

Lady Mary Fitzclarence, married General Fox in 1824.

Lady Elizabeth Fitzclarence, married Earl of Errol in 1820.

Lady Augusta Fitzclarence, { married 1st, Hon. J. K. Erskine
in 1827.
married 2nd, Lord John Fredk.
Gordon in 1836.

Lady Amelia Fitzclarence, married Viscount Falkland in 1830.

Mrs. Jordan, it will be remembered, had, in addition to the foregoing, one daughter by Daly and three by Ford, and she seems to have considered that in order to marry these well, she must provide each of them with a portion of not less than £10,000. This has been conjectured by some to account for her continuing to perform long after she might otherwise have comfortably retired from the stage. When Frances, the eldest, came of age, Mrs. Jordan took a handsome house for her in Golden Square, which also served as a town house for her sisters when they were not with their mother at Bushy. Frances married a clerk in the Ordnance Office, named Alsop; Dora married another Ordnance Office official, named March; and Lucy married a Colonel (afterwards General) Hawker.

Although Barrington and Boaden both hint that the

Duke frequently solicited Mrs. Jordan to retire from the stage, it appears to be much more probable that her short temporary absences, and the occasional reports that she would accept no more permanent engagements, arose from a growing disinclination on her own part. While on one of her profitable little 'cruises' from Bushy, she wrote to Boaden from Bath, in 1809, saying, 'I am quite tired of the profession. I have lost those great encitements, variety and emulation . . . without these, it is a mere money-making drudgery.' But she went on to console herself by remembering that, notwithstanding the great drawback of unsettled weather, she would clear, between that place and Bristol from £800 to £900. Her professional success throughout had, indeed, she admitted, been extraordinary, and 'attended with great emoluments'; but although she by this time had enough for herself, that was too selfish a consideration to weigh for one moment against what she considered to be a duty:—

'From the first starting in life, at the early age of fourteen, I have always had a large family to support. My mother was a duty. But on brothers and sisters I have lavished more money than can be supposed, and more, I am sorry to say, than I can well justify to those who have a stronger and prior claim on my exertions.'

But although she went to the theatre languidly and with apparent reluctance, as Barrington, who on one occasion accompanied her to the green-room at Liverpool, observed; yet 'the moment her foot touched the boards, her spirit seemed to be regenerated. She walked spiritedly across the stage, as if to measure its extent, the comic eye and cordial laugh returned to their mistress, and every sign of depression vanished.' Naturally enough, there were times at which it was particularly repugnant to her to assume some of the male parts in which she had previously achieved

such great popularity. One such occasion brought out a highly amusing story. Wroughton, the manager, noticing her evident discontent at rehearsal, sarcastically remarked—‘Why, you are quite *grand*, madam,—quite the *Duchess* this morning.’ To which Mrs. Jordan rejoined—‘Very likely; for you are not the first person to-day who has condescended to honour me ironically with the title.’ And she then went on to tell the company that having had occasion that morning to discharge an Irish maid for impertinence, the woman, when she received her wages, had held up one of the shillings, and then, banging it on the table, exclaimed—‘Arrah! now, honey; with this thirteener, won’t I sit in the gallery!—and won’t your *Royal Grace* give me a curtsy!—and won’t I give your *Royal Highness* a howl, and a hiss into the bargain!’ It must have been sometimes rather difficult to sustain concurrently the rôles of quasi-Duchess and popular comédienne; but although Mrs. Jordan was occasionally the subject of attack in what Boaden terms ‘the infamous prints’ of the time, it was very seldom that she heard a hiss in the theatre; and from the commencement of her career to its close, not only was her professional pre-eminence cordially acknowledged, but her popularity was scarcely, if at all, affected by what was known of the circumstances of her private history. Amongst her professional associates she maintained an engaging modesty; was never offended by frank criticism of her acting; and had good sense enough to prefer sincerity to adulation. In fact, she seems to have had a far less exalted notion of her acting than had many of the professional critics. John Taylor relates in his *Memoirs* that he was sitting with her one night in the green-room of Covent Garden Theatre, when she was about to perform the part of Rosalind in *As You Like It*.

‘I happened to mention [he writes] an actor who had recently

appeared with wonderful success, and expressed my surprise at the public taste in this instance. "Oh, Mr. Taylor, don't mention public taste," said she, "for if the public had any taste, how could they bear me in the part which I play to-night, and which is far above my habits and pretensions."

Yet this, says Taylor, was one of the parts in which she was so popular; and he might have added that it was one of the parts in which so discriminating a critic as Leigh Hunt thought her peculiar excellences made her most delightful; while the poet Campbell declared that Shakespeare himself, if he had been a living spectator, would have gone behind the scenes to salute her for her success in it.

The glimpses we get of Mrs. Jordan behind the scenes are by no means superabundant; but, such as they are, they show her to have been a woman of frank and generous character, always ready to assist less fortunate players either with purse or performance, while at the same time keen enough in her own business arrangements to draw from Tate Wilkinson the avowal that 'at making a bargain, Mrs. Jordan is too many for the cunningest devil of us all.' She seems to have possessed a good sound understanding, and considerable native talent in more than one direction; for, although she never set up for an author, she wrote fairly well both in prose and in verse; and although, like Mrs. Siddons, she was no showy talker, her conversation was not only marked by good sense and propriety, but also exhibited a good deal of humour. A story is told showing how her generosity once conquered even the repugnance to her profession which was then almost part of the religion of the fanatical nonconformists. During a short stay at Chester, where she had been performing, her washerwoman, a widow with three small children, had been thrown into prison for a debt of forty shillings, which extortionate legal expenses had run up to the amount of £8. As soon as Mrs. Jordan

heard of the matter, she paid the money and set the poor woman free. On the afternoon of the same day, while taking a walk with her servant, she had occasion to stand up under a porch during a passing shower, when she was surprised by the appearance of the widow and her children, who had been seeking her all over the town, and who now fell on their knees and poured out a flood of thanks and blessings. Mrs. Jordan was affected to tears; but, to end the scene, she slipped a pound note into the woman's hand and bade her go away without another word. As soon as the washerwoman had departed, another person who, unobserved, had also taken shelter under the porch, a tall, spare, pale-faced man, in a suit of rusty black, stepped forward, and, holding out his hand, said with a sigh—'Lady, pardon the freedom of a stranger; but would to God the world were all like thee!' Mrs. Jordan, who at once divined the man's profession, retired a pace or two and said good-humouredly but mischievously—'No: I won't shake hands with you.'—'Why?'—'Because you are a Methodist preacher; and when you know who I am you'll send me to the devil!'—'The Lord forbid! I am, as you say, a preacher of Jesus Christ; who tells us to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and relieve the distressed: and do you think I can behold a sister fulfil the commands of my Great Master without feeling that spiritual attachment which leads me to break through worldly customs and offer you the hand of friendship and brotherly love?'—'Well, well,' persisted Mrs. Jordan, 'you are a good old soul, I dare say; but—I—I don't like fanatics: and you'll not like *me* when you know who I am.'—'I hope I shall.'—'Well, then, I'll tell you. I am a player.' The preacher sighed. 'Yes, I am a player; and you must have heard of me. My name is Mrs. Jordan.' The preacher was staggered for a moment; then, smiling sadly, he again held out his hand, saying—

‘The Lord bless thee, whoever thou art. His goodness is unlimited. He has bestowed on thee a large portion of His spirit. And as to thy calling, if thy soul upbraid thee not, the Lord forbid that I should.’ When the rain had abated, the preacher offered his arm, and having conducted Mrs. Jordan to the door of her lodging, again shook hands as he said—‘Fare thee well, sister. I know not what the principles of thy calling may be: thou art the first I ever conversed with. But if their benevolent practices equal thine, I hope and trust, at the Great Day, the Almighty will say to each—*Thy sins are forgiven thee.*’

In 1809 a rumour gained currency that the Duke of Clarence and Mrs. Jordan had quarrelled and parted; and while at Bath, on one of her profitable little ‘cruises,’ she wrote to a friend telling how, having gone one day to a fashionable library, where she was unknown, to read the papers, she was entertained by some ladies with a most pathetic description of the parting between herself and the Duke; her very dress being described, and the whole conversation accurately repeated. In another letter, written from Bushy near about the same date, she says:—

‘With regard to the report of my quarrel with the Duke, every day of our past and present lives must give the lie to it. He is an example for half the husbands and fathers in the world; the best of masters, and the most firm and generous of friends. I will, in a day or two, avail myself of your kind offers to contradict these odious, and truly wicked reports.’

Scarcely two years afterwards, however, when their connection had lasted twenty years, and her happiness had not been interrupted, as she declared, by even the semblance of a quarrel during the whole time, there came a bolt from the blue. While acting at Cheltenham, she received a letter from the Duke informing her that their connection must cease, and desiring her to meet him at Maidenhead to bid

each other farewell. She had one night more to play ; and courageously went down to the theatre, notwithstanding a succession of fainting fits which had been brought on by the unexpected and astounding announcement. She managed to struggle on through her part, until she arrived at a passage where she was supposed to have been made laughing drunk. But when she attempted to laugh, she burst into tears instead. Of course the audience knew nothing of what had happened to her ; and the scene was saved by the actor with whom she was playing altering his text, and with great readiness exclaiming—‘ Why, Nell, the conjuror has not only made thee drunk ; he has made thee *crying* drunk.’ As soon as the performance was over, she hurried off in a travelling chariot, just as she was, in her stage dress, to keep her appointment with the Duke. What passed between them has never been made known. Sir Jonah Barrington declares that the cause of their separation was in no way discreditable to either party ; and that the Duke did not desert her ; but that to the last hour of his life his solicitude was undiminished, while he never lost sight of her interests or her comforts. This is certainly somewhat hard to reconcile with the facts ; and if Barrington were so sure that ‘ not *one* of all the accounts and surmises was true,’ he might have given us at least some indication of what the true cause of the separation was. Greville, writing in his Diary after William’s death in 1837, said that up to that date the separation had not been explained ; but he surmised it to arise from the Duke’s desire to better his condition by a good marriage. We know from one of Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire’s letters to Augustus Foster that before November 1811 the Duke had proposed to Miss Long, and had been rejected ; though the Duchess adds ‘ they say that he don’t despair.’ And his various real or supposed matrimonial projects about this time were sufficiently notorious to beget a couple of

volumes of indifferent verses from Peter Pindar entitled *The R—l Lovers* and *The Three R—l Bloods*. In fact, from 1811 to 1817 he appears to have been going about, like Coelebs, in search of a wife. Captain Gronow relates in his *Reminiscences* that in the latter year, the Duke, being still bent upon improving his pecuniary position by marrying a rich heiress, had, with the consent of his brother, the Prince Regent, proposed to Miss Wykeham (described by Greville as a ‘half-crazy woman’ on whom William, after his accession, conferred a peerage), but of whom Gronow only observes that she had large estates in Oxfordshire of immense value. The report of this projected alliance seems to have created consternation in the royal family. Queen Charlotte was in violent agitation; and the law officers of the crown were consulted to see whether such marriage could not be prevented. But after a little while the *Morning Post* announced that the Duke’s intended marriage was ‘off’; and it was generally supposed that the Queen and other members of the royal family had subscribed to pay off the Duke’s debts and give him a little money to go on with. That Greville’s supposition was probably correct receives some confirmation from certain letters of Mrs. Jordan to Boaden. A few days after the startling announcement had been made, she wrote from Bushy:—

‘Money, money, my good friend, or the want of it, has, I am convinced, made HIM at this moment the most wretched of men. But with all his excellent qualities, his domestic virtues, his love for his lovely children, what must he not at this moment suffer. . . .

‘All his letters are full of the most unqualified praise of my conduct; and it is the most heartfelt blessing to know that to the best of my power I have endeavoured to deserve it. . . . I have received the greatest kindness and attention from the Regent, and every branch of the royal family, who, in the most *unreserved terms*, deplore this melancholy business. The whole correspondence is

before the Regent, and I am proud to add that my past and present conduct has secured me a friend who declares he will never forsake me. My forbearance, he says, is beyond what he could have imagined ; but what will not a woman do who is firmly and sincerely attached ? Had he left me to starve, I never would have uttered a word to his disadvantage. . . .

‘And now, my dear friend, do not hear the Duke of Clarence unfairly abused. He has done wrong, and he is suffering for it. But as far as he has left it in his own power, he is doing everything kind and noble, even to the distressing himself.’

And on the 7th of December she wrote to the same correspondent from St. James’s:—

‘I lose not a moment in letting you know that the Duke of Clarence has concluded and settled on me and on his children the most liberal and generous provision ; and I trust everything will sink into oblivion.’

It will be necessary to re-examine these letters presently ; but in the meantime we may go on with the story. It was not long before Mrs. Jordan secured a number of lucrative engagements. From 1811 to 1814 she acted at Covent Garden and in the provinces ; and, according to Barrington, was able to earn the incredibly large sum of £7000 in a single year. Boaden had his doubts about so high a figure as this ; but says that she was, up to the time of her final performances at Margate in the summer of 1815, extraordinarily successful.

The year 1814, however, was a time of great domestic trouble and anxiety. Two of her sons, George and Henry Fitzclarence, together with several other officers of the 10th Royal Hussars, had ventured to accuse their commanding officer, Colonel Quentin, of neglect and incapacity in the field. There is no need to tell the whole story here ; but the result was that although the Colonel was court-martialled and reprimanded, the officers who had ventured to criticise their erring commander were summarily dismissed from the regi-

ment. Soon after, the two Fitzclarences were sent out to India; where Henry died three years later, without having obtained any further advancement in his profession. This affair seems to have affected Mrs. Jordan almost as powerfully as a far more serious trouble with another branch of her family. Her son-in-law, Alsop, appears to have been a dissolute and extravagant man, whose affairs in 1814 had become so involved that he was sent out to India in attendance on Lord Moira, with the view, says Boaden, that he might, after obtaining some suitable employment there, send for his wife to join him. He did obtain a very satisfactory post as Civil Magistrate at Calcutta; where he remained, without his wife, to the end of his days. It appears, however, from a letter written by Mrs. Jordan in December of this year, that Mrs. Alsop must have been as much to blame as her husband. 'You talk of Mrs. A.'s *desire* to go to her husband,' she writes. 'If it were affection or duty that prompted her, I should pity, though even in that case it would at this time be out of my power to forward her wishes; but this is not the case, as you must know.' In what way Mrs. Alsop had shown the 'ingratitude' with which she was charged does not appear; but it can have been no light matter which caused so affectionate a mother to suspend all direct communications, and to write about her in the following strain:—

'I therefore, for the last time, most solemnly declare to *her*, through you, that these are the last and only propositions that shall ever be offered. That she shall go to her uncle in Wales, where I will pay £40 a year for her board and lodging, allowing her £50 a year for clothes, till such time as her husband may be able to maintain her abroad, when every exertion shall be made to send her out. If she refuses this, I here *swear*, by the most heart-breaking oath that presents itself to my tortured mind, that "May I never see again those two sacrificed young men [*i.e.* the two cashiered Fitzclarences] if I ever (if possible) think of her again as a child that has any claim on *me*.'"

From this point to the end, Mrs. Jordan's history is involved in a cloud of mystery. All that the public learned at the time was that, after a most successful series of performances in 1815, Mrs. Jordan in the autumn of that year retired to France, and they heard no more of her until in July 1816 the newspapers announced her death at St. Cloud. But when it became known that her property had been sworn under £300; and there appeared in the *Morning Post* of December 8, 1823, an advertisement to the effect that the creditors of the late Dorothea Jordan, who had proved their debts, might receive a dividend of five shillings in the pound by applying to the office of the Solicitor to the Treasury, there was naturally enough an outcry; and the royal lover who had discarded her, and to all appearance left her to die in poverty and exile, came in for a good deal of animadversion. It was in vain that a new Sunday paper, called the *Weekly Globe*, in its first number, which appeared on January 4, 1824, explained that it was merely because Mrs. Jordan had died intestate in France that her property vested in the Crown and made it necessary for the King's solicitor to collect her effects and apply them in the first instance to the payment of her debts, just as would have been done in the case of any other British subject dying abroad intestate; and attempted to stem the tide of 'bitter invective against a Royal Personage formerly connected with that interesting female by many dear and intimate ties,' by announcing that he had settled on her an income of £2000 a year, the last quarter of which (though not due until after the date of her death) had been paid to a representative whom she had sent over from France to receive it for her. Popular feeling ran high; and it was felt that some further explanation was advisable. Accordingly, three weeks later, Mr. John Barton, an official of the Royal Mint (and also private secretary to His Royal Highness), acting as he declared on his own initiative, took up the task of

justifying his 'illustrious master' in a communication which occupied something over a column of the *Morning Post*. Not only, he said, had the whole of the arrangements made at the separation of the Duke and Mrs. Jordan passed through his hands, but it was also at his suggestion that in 1815 Mrs. Jordan left this country for France, the reason for this step being that it would enable her readily and honourably to extricate herself from certain troubles into which she had fallen through a misplaced confidence. At the separation in 1811, said Mr. Barton, it was agreed that Mrs. Jordan should have the care, until a certain age, of her four youngest daughters, and that the Duke should pay to her annually—

For the maintenance of his four daughters,	. £1500
For a house and carriage for their use, .	. 600
For Mrs. Jordan's own use, . . .	. 1500
To enable Mrs. Jordan to make provision for her married daughters (children of a former connection), ...	. 800
Total, . . .	£4400

A trustee was appointed, and the moneys were paid quarterly to the respective accounts in Coutts's bank. It was stipulated, however, that in the event of Mrs. Jordan resuming her profession of actress, the care of the Duke's four daughters and the money appropriated for their use should revert to him. This event did take place in the course of a few months, in consequence of Mrs. Jordan's decision to accept certain profitable engagements to perform. At the time of this settlement, moreover, says Mr. Barton, 'everything in the shape of a money transaction was brought to account,' even the most trifling sums (lent to the Duke, we may presume) being admitted, interest being calculated up to date, and the balance paid to Mrs.

Jordan, whose receipt for the same remained in his hands. After this, Mr. Barton had no correspondence with Mrs. Jordan until, in September 1815, he was surprised by a note requesting him to call on her. He found her in tears; and learned that she had given acceptances in blank, upon stamped paper, which she supposed to be for small sums, but which had afterwards been filled up for large amounts. All she required, declares Barton, in order to set her mind at ease on the extent of the demand which might be made out against her, was that the person who had plunged her into all these difficulties should declare on oath that the list he had given her included the whole. This the person referred to from time to time refused to do; and Mrs. Jordan sank under the strain and died at St. Cloud. Such is Mr. Barton's statement: which may be taken as the authorised and official case for the Duke. Sir Jonah Barrington, who, it will be remembered, was also a friend of the Duke's, in his *Personal Sketches of his Own Times*, written in 1828, asserts that at the moment of her death Mrs. Jordan could have lived not only in comfort but in luxury. She had, he declares, money in the bank, money in the Funds, and money in miscellaneous property; and could have commanded any sums she thought proper during the whole time of her residence in France. His notion is that she 'took a whim to affect poverty.' The reason why she emigrated, pined away, and expired in a foreign land, was a miserable story that should never be told by his pen. This much only he will say, that it was a transaction wherein her Royal Friend had, neither directly nor indirectly, any concern whatever, nor did it spring out of anything in that connection. At the same time, as Boaden points out, Sir Jonah by no means obscurely hints that it was entirely due to the conduct of Mrs. Jordan's son-in-law, Alsop, who had forfeited his honour, betrayed

her confidence, and repaid her benevolence with ruin. At the time Sir Jonah wrote, both Alsop and his wife were dead. But Boaden prints a statement which (although his account of its authorship is rather confused) he had apparently previously obtained from the incriminated son-in-law. According to this document, Mrs. Jordan was unexpectedly called upon in the autumn of 1815 to redeem some securities given by her for money raised to assist a near relative; and finding herself unable to advance the £2000 required, she retired to France, deputing a friend in England to make the necessary arrangements for paying all the creditors as soon as possible. Before she left England, a statement of all claims against her was made out, which showed that her total liabilities did not exceed £2000. At this time, the statement proceeds, she was in receipt of an annual income of over £2000, 'paid with the greatest punctuality quarterly, without demur, drawback, or impediment, and so continued to the hour of her death.' When she went to France it was with the intention of staying about ten days only, to enable arrangements to be made to save her from any danger of arrest. But when month after month elapsed without these arrangements being made, her mind became troubled. The lady companion she took with her (Miss Sketchley), who had at one time been governess to her children, and for the last twelve months her own constant attendant, came to England in January 1816 to receive and take back Mrs. Jordan's quarterly allowance. But this lady, while in England, made mischief with the bondholders, and (for some unexplained reason) informed Mrs. Jordan's children not only that their mother's future place of residence in France was to be kept a profound secret even from them, but that all letters must in the future be sent to her through a third person and addressed to Mrs. James. It was this cutting off of all direct com-

munications from England which, if this statement is to be credited, finally unhinged Mrs. Jordan's mind, and was the cause of her death.

The undeniable fact that she was in needy circumstances so soon after her separation from the Duke of Clarence has been, and still remains, a puzzle to all who have attempted to investigate the matter. During the twenty years of her connection with the royal Duke, it would be only natural to suppose, as her 'Confidential Friend' observes, that she would not be called upon to pay the house rent or the expenses of the royal table. But his estimate that her earnings for the whole of that period averaged £4000 a year, and that consequently, even after providing marriage portions of £10,000 for each of her three daughters by Ford, she ought to have been possessed of over £100,000 at the time of the separation, is doubtless somewhat too high. But even if we suppose her earnings to have averaged only half as much, this would have given her, even after providing for the three marriage portions, a very liberal margin for her own dress and personal expenditure, while leaving her free to save at least the royal allowance of £1000 a year, which (as Mr. Barton, in the semi-official statement already referred to, assures us) was regularly paid. One thousand pounds every year, for nineteen years, placed out at five per cent. compound interest (a rate then easily obtainable), would have provided Mrs. Jordan, at the date of the separation, with an invested capital of £32,066, bringing in an income of £1600 a year. If we add to this the £2300 per annum which remained to her, according to the terms of the separation settlement, after she had given up the Duke's children and their allowance to their father, she would have been in possession of a settled income of £3900 a year, in addition to the large earnings which she admittedly made between 1811 and 1815, and which would undoubtedly have

raised it to close upon £6000. Even if we suppose that at the time of the separation she had no savings, but in addition to her earnings after that date (which it is a low estimate to place at £2000 a year), had nothing but the Duke's allowance, is it credible that, with £4300 per annum coming in, she could possibly have been driven to exile and despair by the unexpected demand for a sum not exceeding £2000? Some other explanation is quite evidently necessary. Boaden's suggestion that the money alleged to have been paid to Mrs. Jordan at the time of the separation, 'with interest calculated to date,' consisted of 'some part of her fortune' which she had placed at the 'temporary disposition of her illustrious friend,' only makes the matter worse; as also does his assertion that not one-half of the promised marriage portions of any of her daughters was ever paid; for, if this were the case, she ought at the time of the separation to have been possessed of an even larger capital. In fact, there seems to be no escape from one of two conclusions. Either, as Boaden very delicately hints, her sons in the army must have been a perpetual and exhausting drain on her resources; or, as the epigrammatist 'Pindar Junr.' put it, instead of the Duke keeping her, she must for twenty years have been keeping him. Something may doubtless be said in favour of the former supposition. Those semi-royal young gentlemen were doubtless very expensive to keep; and neither the father's money nor his influence may have been sufficient to satisfy all their wishes. In fact, he could not satisfy them with the far greater means at his disposal after he had come to the throne; for Greville diarises to the effect that, although one of William's main occupations was to provide as handsomely as possible for his family, all the sons, except Adolphus, behaved to him with great insolence and ingratitude. And Joseph Jekyll, in a letter written in September 1833, hints at something of the same kind when

he refers to the Windsor treasurer's grumbling at 'snug dinners to one hundred and twenty tags and rags every week.' Jekyll says that poor William had no other expenses, for he bought no pictures, statues, racehorses, or diamonds for pretty ladies. But 'his babies, they say, pillage him, as the parish does not feed illegitimates'; and the caustic wit declares he would like to ask the King, as Foote did another poor man who was cursed with twelve children—'When do you begin to drown?' But they could not have pillaged their mother also, to any great extent, while they were quite young babies; and even if she did have to contribute towards the expenses of her military sons, it could only have been for a very short time. From a letter written by Colonel Frederick Fitzclarence to Mrs. Jordan during her exile in France (which is printed in Boaden's *Life*), it is evident that he, at any rate, was at that time in receipt of an allowance from her as well as from his father. But, as Frederick was only twelve years of age at the date of the separation, that drain could only account for the disappearance of a comparatively small sum. There is no direct proof, of course, in favour of the second supposition that some part of Mrs. Jordan's fortune had been placed, as Boaden euphemistically phrases it, at the temporary disposition of her illustrious friend; but it is difficult to see what else could have become of the great bulk of her large earnings during the twenty years of their life together. And what other interpretation is to be put upon certain expressions in the letter quoted some pages back wherein she says that the whole correspondence had been placed before the Regent, who had characterised her 'forbearance' as 'beyond what he could have imagined.' What, other than a pecuniary one, could have been the nature of this 'forbearance,' shown by a mere actress towards his royal brother, that was sufficient to arouse the wonder and admiration of George IV.? And what else

can be the meaning of the words which immediately follow: 'but what would not a woman do who is firmly and sincerely attached? Had he left me to starve, I never would have uttered a word to his disadvantage?' The inference seems to be irresistible that at the time of their separation the Duke of Clarence was hopelessly in debt to Mrs. Jordan; and that the repayment of the money, 'with interest calculated to date,' about which, seven years after Mrs. Jordan was dead and gone, Mr. Barton made such a flourish, was a mere paper arrangement, she giving her royal but impecunious lover an acquittance for which she received no equivalent. 'What would not a woman do who is firmly and sincerely attached?' And the 'liberal and generous provision' for herself and his children was probably of no greater cash value. Who, indeed, that knows anything of the financial condition of His Royal Highness, can suggest where the money was to come from? And, at any rate, as already pointed out, the alleged punctual payment of the specified allowance is altogether incompatible with the distress in which Mrs. Jordan was plunged in the autumn of 1815. Is it not highly probable that when she sent to Mr. Barton in September of that year, her 'unexpected' note was an unexpected request that on this occasion at least she might receive some of the promised money; and that his inability to provide her with any funds at the moment led to what he admits was his suggestion that she should retire for a time to the Continent? It is perhaps not without significance in this connection that when Queen Victoria came to the throne she enchanted everybody, as the garrulous Creevy tells us, by her munificence to the Fitzclarences. Besides their pensions out of the public pension list, they had, he says, nearly £10,000 a year given them by their father out of his privy purse, every farthing of which the new Queen continued out of *her* privy purse. Queen

Victoria, as is well known, looked with no favourable eye on irregular connections. But her otherwise surprising munificence would be accounted for if we may suppose her to have had evidence that the father of these Fitzclarences, and her predecessor on the throne, had been largely indebted for the support of himself and his children to the earnings of a discarded actress.

And it is not only the mystery of Mrs. Jordan's money which requires clearing up, but the mystery also of Mrs. Jordan's death. Towards the end of June 1816 one of the daughters received a letter from Miss Sketchley informing her that, after a few days' illness, her mother had died at St. Cloud. Three days later, a second letter arrived from the same lady saying that she had been deceived by Mrs. Jordan's appearance, who was still alive, though very ill. Before arrangements could be made for the daughter (who had a month-old baby) to go to her mother, a third letter arrived, announcing that Mrs. Jordan was this time really dead. General Hawker, her son-in-law, went off at once to France, and arrived at St. Cloud about three days after the interment had taken place. Barrington says that Mrs. Jordan went first to Boulogne, and, after a short stay there, to Versailles, and that, later, when she went to St. Cloud, she lived entirely secluded, and passed by the name of Johnson. Some time afterwards he visited the place, and found that she had had apartments in a large, gloomy, cold, dilapidated house, adjoining the palace. The master of the house informed him that, from the first moment of her arrival, she had exhibited the most restless anxiety for intelligence from England. Every letter she received seemed to have a different effect on her feelings; and she became more anxious and miserable as time went on, lying from morning till night, sighing, upon her sofa. One morning she eagerly requested him to go to the post for her letters, that she might have

them before the usual hour of delivery. On his return, she started up, holding out her hand. He told her there were no letters for her. Whereupon she stood motionless for a moment, looking at him with a vacant stare, then held out her hand again, then withdrew it, and finally sank down on her sofa and breathed her last. This account contains no reference to Miss Sketchley, or to the first seizure which that lady had mistaken for death. The 'Confidential Friend' adds another item to the mystery. He says that he received the following story from a man who had known Mrs. Jordan intimately when he was in business in London as confectioner to George III. This person, whose London business had fallen off, had established himself in the same line in Paris; and, in 1816, hearing that Mrs. Jordan was at St. Cloud, he went there to call upon her. To his surprise, however, he found that she was surrounded by spies, and after many questions had been asked him, and evasive answers given to all his inquiries, he had to return to Paris without obtaining an interview. Shortly after this he received a letter from Mrs. Jordan entreating him to come after midnight beneath a certain window in the house in which she was living. He went, and she told him she was kept there in captivity, and was without money to enable her to escape. She gladly received the 18 or 20 francs which her nocturnal visitor happened to have in his pocket; and he then arranged that he would return to her the following night with £20. Next day he brought the money according to promise, and it was then agreed that ten days afterwards he should come for her, and she would travel with him to England. He duly arrived on the appointed day, but only to be told that Mrs. Jordan had died the day previous. When to all this we have to add that there are two divergent accounts of the funeral; that in 1819, according to *Galignani's Messenger*, there was a debt of sixty francs

still due and unpaid to the municipality of St. Cloud for the ground she was buried in; and that, as Barrington declares, when he subsequently visited the cemetery, there was no stone to tell where she lay, it is perhaps scarcely surprising that for some years a report prevailed that she was not dead after all. Boaden, who had known her well enough for something like eighteen years, believed that he saw her, long after 1816, in London.

‘She was near-sighted [he writes] and wore a glass attached to a gold chain about her neck; her manner of using this to assist her sight was extremely peculiar. I was taking a very usual walk before dinner, and I stopped at a bookseller’s window on the left side of Piccadilly to look at an embellishment to some new publication that struck my eye. On a sudden, a lady stood by my side, who had stopt with a similar impulse. To my conviction it was Mrs. Jordan. As she did not speak, but dropt a long white veil immediately over her face, I concluded that she did not wish to be recognised, and therefore, however I should have wished an explanation of what so surprised me, I yielded to her pleasure upon the occasion, grounded, I had no doubt, upon sufficient reasons.’

He afterwards learned that Mrs. Alsop was confident that she had met her mother in the Strand, after the report of her death, the shock throwing her into fits at the time, and nothing being able to persuade her to the day of her death that she had been deceived.

The suggestion has never been made that the Duke of Clarence parted from Mrs. Jordan because he was tired of her, or because, like his amorous brother, his fickle fancy had transferred itself to some other charmer. On the contrary, there is ample evidence that he maintained his affection and admiration to the end of his days. Moore notes in his *Diary* that one day at dinner at Sir Benjamin Brodie’s in 1836, Chantrey told him of a group he had just executed for the King of Mrs. Jordan and some of her children, and described the strong feeling which the King evinced when he first

proposed the task to him, saying that it had been for many years his intention to have such a memorial executed as soon as he should be in a situation to afford it. And the *Memoirs of Charles Mathews* (the elder) contain an even more emphatic testimony. Mathews attended on the Duke at Bushy one morning in November 1826, and was shown into the room where His Royal Highness and the Duchess had just breakfasted. The latter, after a few gracious and complimentary words about the comedian's performance of the previous day, left them; and at that very moment Mathews's eye was caught by a life-sized portrait of Mrs. Jordan, hanging over the chimney-piece. The Duke, observing his look, said—'I know you have a collection of theatrical portraits, Mr. Mathews, which I shall ask to see some day. I hope you have not one like that?' Mathews seems to have shown that he hardly knew how to answer such a rather enigmatical question, and the Duke went on to say—'I mean so good a likeness. I should be vexed that anybody possessed such a one but myself—a *better* one it is not possible to find, and I should not like anybody else to have *as good* a one.' Then, gazing on the picture, he said with strong emphasis and emotion—'She was one of the best of women, Mr. Mathews.' Mathews says the Duke's emotion brought tears into his own eyes. But he must surely have thought, even though he could not ask the question—'Why then did you abandon her?'



Harriet Mellon. Duchess of St. Albans.

HARRIOT MELLON (DUCHESS OF ST. ALBANS)

SOME wit once remarked that the 'Lives' of the players were the only ones worth reading, because, seeing that actors and actresses were not expected to be respectable, their biographers did not mind telling the whole truth about them. But a player who had become a Duchess was, of course, on another footing altogether; and the *Memoirs of Miss Mellon, afterwards Duchess of St. Albans*, by Mrs. Cornwall Baron-Wilson, which first appeared in two volumes in 1839, were undertaken with the avowed object of clearing that lady's character from all trace of scandal. Unfortunately Mrs. Baron-Wilson too often asks us to accept her conclusions in place of setting forth the evidence on which they were based; and she also gives the impression of pushing her advocacy too far. Anything ever said by anybody in disparagement of Miss Mellon, or Mrs. Coutts, or her Grace of St. Albans, is stigmatised as an 'unfounded calumny'; and we are invited to regard this player girl, reared in poverty and wretchedness, who rose to become one of the wealthiest women of her time and an authentic Duchess, as, from first to last, a paragon of womanly perfection. It is evident enough that certain deductions require to be made from this estimate. Nevertheless it is undeniable that the history of Miss Mellon's career makes a striking contrast to the more or less disreputable lives of the great majority of the ladies who held a similar position on the English stage in the eighteenth century.

Harriot's mother was the only daughter of a couple of

Irish peasants or cottiers. Her education consisted entirely in the learning by heart of the church prayers, and of a considerable quantity of the popular traditional poetry of the Irish : to the end of her life she was unable to write, or even read. After earning her living for a short time as a shop girl in Cork, she developed an ambition to appear on the stage ; but although she had the recommendation of remarkable beauty, her histrionic talent appears to have been so small that she had to be content with the position of dresser, wardrobe-keeper, and money-taker in Kena's company of strolling players, which in the earlier part of the second half of the eighteenth century was well known throughout Ireland and Wales. She is said to have been reared in an atmosphere of great devotion, and to have remained extremely pious to the end of her life. She claimed to have been married, on Twelfth Day 1777, to a Lieutenant Mathew Mellon, of the Madras Native Infantry, who left her in London in the following March while he proceeded to join his regiment in India. He was assumed to be the Mr. Mellon who was reported to have died of consumption during his passage between the Cape and Madras ; but, anyway, she never saw or heard from him any more. She always maintained that Mathew Mellon was an assumed name, and that her husband was a great nobleman in disguise. But she was unable to say what his name really was ; and, unfortunately, she could only assert, without proving, that he had married her. She was fond of speaking of the 'high blood' which Harriot had in her veins ; but this appears to have been merely a flight of the romantic Irishwoman's imagination. A gentleman who was with her and Harriot in a box at Drury Lane in 1814, when the latter was publicly known to be connected in some way with Coutts the banker, remembered the mother saying oracularly—'If my Harriot knew who she really was, this

box would not be sufficient for her! Mr. Coutts is a very excellent man, but in point of birth he is not half good enough for Harriot.' To which the daughter, who had sense enough to see the absurdity of her mother's claim, laughingly replied—'I dare say, my dear mother, I am a princess in disguise; but I am so well disguised that the King, my father, will have immense trouble to find me out.' To whomsoever married, or whether married or not, however, Sarah Mellon, as she then called herself, gave birth to a daughter in November 1777. In the spring of the following year she rejoined Kena's company, and four years later she married Thomas Entwisle, a young man several years her junior, who played in Kena's small orchestra. Her one aim throughout life appears to have been the social advancement of her only child. Entwisle also became very attached to his little step-daughter; and we are told that his personal comfort was frequently sacrificed in order that she might have such education as was compatible with their strolling way of life. Although Mrs. Entwisle's temper was so explosive that the child was sometimes half-killed by her capricious violence, mother and daughter always maintained a strong affection for one another; and when the daughter became a rich woman both mother and step-father were treated by her with much generosity. In the summer of 1783 the Entwisles joined Thomas Bibby's company, and settled at Ulverstone in Lancashire, where Harriot was sent to a day school. As a small child she could sing and recite very prettily, and dance beautifully; and it is evident that her mother and step-father must have given her somewhat better tuition than usually fell to the lot of a stroller's child; though out of a salary of £1 a week there can have been little to spare for educational purposes.

When ten years of age she made her first appearance on the boards as Little Pickle in *The Spoiled Child*; and did so

well that manager Bibby presented her with ten shillings. After this he put her forward as Priscilla Tomboy in *The Romp*; and for two years following she played similar characters in a barn adjoining the White Hart Hotel, which then did duty as the Ulverstone Theatre. In December 1789 she played Phoebe in *As You Like It*; and immediately after this first appearance in a Shakespearean character Mrs. Entwisle demanded that her daughter's salary should be raised. After some consideration manager Bibby offered to increase her weekly stipend to four shillings and sixpence; but Mrs. Entwisle, who had more ambitious projects in view, was not satisfied with this offer, and promptly withdrew not only her daughter but her husband also from Bibby's service. After Harriot had acted in some of the smaller towns, and on one occasion appeared with great success as Peggy in *The Country Girl*, the family joined Stanton's company, which was then conducted on the sharing system. At first they lodged with a shoemaker in Stafford, having two rooms 10 feet by $4\frac{3}{4}$ in measurement, for which they paid half-a-crown a week. After a short time the sharing system was exchanged for regular salaries, when Harriot received fifteen shillings a week, and her stepfather a guinea. This comparative wealth enabled them to take somewhat better lodgings; but what was deemed of far greater importance by Mrs. Entwisle was that the manager's family took much notice of Harriot; and by taking her out to juvenile parties with her own children, Mrs. Stanton introduced her to what her ambitious mother then considered high society. And the girl really did make friends in a class far above her own. While at Burton-on-Trent she had been much noticed by one of the principal families there, and these good people had given her an introduction to the family of a Mr. Wright, a banker at Stafford, with whose family she became very intimate. Mr. Wright's daughters not only had

her at their house perpetually, but by presents of gowns, gloves, and shoes, and by the loan of their jewellery, greatly contributed to the appearance she was able to make on the stage. Through their interest also she obtained invitations to the parties of several of the other better-class families of the place; into which, it is worthy of note, Mrs. Entwisle was careful never to intrude herself, although she invariably attended Harriot to the doors of her fine friends, and called to escort her home. A professional connection of the family remarked of her at this period, when she was about sixteen years of age:—

‘Miss Mellon was a great favourite among the principal families, and with all the young people of both sexes; she was a very steady, prudent girl, remarkably handsome, and always smiling and pleasant looking. The mother was a gay, pretty woman; but very rough with her daughter occasionally. Although [!] Harriot’s salary was fifteen shillings a week, they were in straitened circumstances, because her step-father was disposed to drinking and low company. Miss Mellon’s situation between the two, who disagreed exceedingly, was greatly pitied.’

When a new theatre was opened in Stafford in 1792 Miss Mellon’s salary was raised to a guinea a week; but this made little difference to her personally, as her mother took every farthing of her money. When some friends lent the young girl a pony and a riding habit, for example, her mother would not even give her a penny to pay the turnpike. In 1794 Sheridan first saw and admired her performance in *The Rump* and *The Belle’s Stratagem*; and, being pressed by the Wrights, he promised to give her an engagement shortly at Drury Lane. This year she took a benefit which realised £50; but her mother took the money, merely buying her a dress or two out of it, and letting her have a small sum to contribute to the debtors’ box—a form of charity for which, from first to last, Harriot had an almost superstitious regard.

In June 1795, on the strength of Sheridan's promise of an engagement (which apparently he had entirely forgotten), Harriot and the Entwisles came up to London. At first they took lodgings in the Strand; but as the theatre did not open until September, and Sheridan kept them in uncertainty for the whole of the three months, their means dwindled and they were reduced to take part of a house in St. George's Fields at a rental of £10 per annum. The day after their arrival in London, Harriot took advantage of her mother's absence and ventured out alone to see some of the wonders of the great city. She walked on and on until she arrived at a large building, with pillars and statues in front of it, which she afterwards discovered to be the Royal Exchange. By this time she was feeling very tired; and when a kindly-looking old gentleman, with many capes on his shoulders and a bunch of hay in his hand, came up and inquired if she would like a coach, she jumped at the suggestion and requested him to drive her 'all over London' before taking her home. 'La love ye, miss,' said the man, 'that would cost ye a sight o' money.' 'But look here, sir,' said the young lady from the country, confidently producing her purse, 'I have a shilling to pay you.' The old Jehu told her to get in, though he could only take her about a quarter of the way home for that money; but when he stopped, and said he could go no further, she implored 'dear old Mr. Coachman,' with tears in her eyes, to take her on just another street; and, as a matter of fact, dear old Mr. Coachman drove her all the way home. But when he set her down he remarked, 'This is a bad job, and I shall have to take it out of another fare. But don't you go out by y'self never no more in Lunnon, 'cause you won't find many such fools as me.' This was probably the only occasion on which she went out in London for several years to come except under the watchful guardianship of her judicious

mother. At length, being stimulated by a letter from Mr. Wright, Sheridan sent for Miss Mellon, and having informed her that there was now a vacancy for a young actress at Drury Lane, requested her to give him a specimen of her declamation by reading the scenes of Lydia Languish and Mrs. Malaprop from his play of *The Rivals*. As Mrs. Baron-Wilson relates :—

‘She felt greatly frightened ; and answered, with the naïve, unaffected manner which she retained through life, “I *dare* not, sir, for my life ! I would rather read it to all England. Suppose, sir, you did me the honour of reading it to me ?” There was something so unassuming and child-like in the way she made this daring request, that the manager entered into the oddity of the matter, and read nearly the whole play to his delighted young auditor. She became so identified with the drama that she forgot all dread of the author, and, on his request, she read the scenes of Lydia and her Aunt with so much spirit that Mr. Sheridan applauded repeatedly, told her she could play either character, and gave her an engagement !’

Her salary was fixed at thirty shillings a week ; and on the 17th of September, according to her biographer (though other authorities make it as early as the 31st of January), Sheridan brought her out as Lydia Languish. But, owing to nervousness, her first performance in the London theatre was far inferior to her rehearsal ; and Sheridan judged it better for her to appear merely in choruses and such like for a month, until she had grown accustomed to the house. For not only was this young girl, fresh from provincial barns, now placed in a company which included Mrs. Siddons, Mrs. Jordan, Mrs. Powell, Mrs. Crouch, Miss Farren, Miss Pope, and other first-rate actresses, but the mere size of the theatre appalled her. The largest places she had previously played in were not much larger than some London drawing-rooms, whereas the new Drury ordinarily seated 3,600 persons, and could, on a squeeze,

accommodate 5000. She used to say that, notwithstanding her unusual height, when the curtain drew up and she saw the multitude of faces before her she felt herself 'a mere shrimp.' The impression made by her first appearance is doubtless faithfully enough reflected in the following sentences from one of the morning papers:—

'*The Rivals* was performed last night, with a new actress as Lydia Languish. The lady, whose name is said to be Melling, or Millen, was greatly agitated. Her appearance is strikingly handsome, her voice musical, her action graceful, when not checked by fear; and there were some tones of archness at times, which practice may increase; so it would be unfair to call last night a failure, though she did not succeed.'

In December of this year she played subsidiary parts in *The Spoiled Child*, *The Country Girl*, *The Romp*, and *The Devil to Pay*, when Mrs. Jordan acted the principal characters; and she used to say afterwards that her own performance in these pieces must have been entirely mechanical, for she was so enchanted as to be completely engrossed by the delightful acting of Mrs. Jordan, in what were four of that eminent actress's best characters. In March 1796 Sheridan showed his appreciation of the advance she was making by selecting her, during Miss Farren's illness, for the part of Berinthia in *The Trip to Scarborough*; and soon afterwards she was chosen, in similar circumstances, to replace Mrs. Jordan as Amanthis in *The Child of Nature*. One of the performers of the time at Drury Lane thus describes her style and appearance, and compares her with the other bright particular stars of the stage:—

'Miss Mellon was a remarkably handsome brunette, but did not look a bit like an actress. She was much more like one of the genuine beauties of a quiet village two hundred miles from town. It was, I suppose, this rusticity which made her for a long time unnoticed; I don't mean unnoticed merely as an actress, for with our company she was, of course, prepared for that; but unnoticed

as a *beauty*. She had really more claim to that title than (two or three excepted) most actresses of the day. Miss Farren was then, despite the smallpox, the reigning toast; she was an elegant woman. Mrs. Jordan was in her bloom; she was a fascinating one. Mrs. Goodall was delightful; and Miss de Camp set half the young fellows mad; nay, Mrs. Bland was voted a charmer by many; the coarse *signora* had admirers; to say nothing of the majestic Siddons, to whom none dared express admiration; the Cleopatra-looking Mrs. Powell, and that most graceful and lovely of all syrens, Mrs. Crouch. These ladies had each a style; you could classify them as divinities; but Miss Mellon was merely a countrified girl, blooming in complexion, with a very tall, fine figure, raven locks, ivory teeth, a cheek like a peach, and coral lips. All she put you in mind of was a country road and a pillion!

She is described as a good-humoured, pleasant creature in the theatre, but with a manner which quickly repelled any disagreeable attentions—as she promptly proved to old Dodd, who fancied himself an Adonis, and pestered many of the younger actresses with his frivolities. She was also popular with the management, from her readiness to turn her hand to anything, and because, after flaunting it as the fine lady of the piece, in consequence of the absence of some more important actress, she would always return to her secondary business with a good grace. In fact the stage had seldom seen so proper and prudent a young lady.

Miss Mellon's success in London was sufficient to secure her several profitable provincial engagements, especially in Liverpool, where the play-going public always insisted on having performers from London. In 1796 she was engaged for the summer season there, at a salary of £2 a week and half a clear benefit. And the engagement was of more than the mere monetary value to her, for it enabled her to show herself in many principal parts, for which she had been only the under-study at Drury Lane. During this season, between the 22nd of June and the 17th of August, she represented

no less than fifty-two characters, and made by salary and benefit, £155. It was while at Liverpool on this occasion that Mrs. Siddons publicly took Miss Mellon under her protection. Leading the younger actress forward by the hand one day in the green-room, the acknowledged queen of the stage addressed the company, saying, 'Ladies and gentlemen, I am told by one I know very well that this young lady for years in his father's company conducted herself with the utmost propriety. I therefore introduce her as my young friend.' And afterwards, pitying her situation in 'that hot-bed of iniquity,' as she called the Drury Lane Theatre, where it was almost impossible for a young, pretty, and unprotected female to escape unscathed, the great tragedian introduced her young friend to the green-room in similar terms. Mr. Coutts is said to have been present on the latter occasion. In March 1796 Miss Mellon and her parents removed from the out-of-the-way neighbourhood of St. George's Fields, to the second floor of No. 17 Little Russell Street, immediately opposite the theatre. To the end of her life the Duchess of St. Albans was accustomed to make a pilgrimage to this dirty narrow street, on every St. Patrick's Day, in a plain dress and without carriage and servants, that she might contemplate, and sometimes show to a chosen friend, the humble spot whence she had risen. During this year, in consequence of the absence of Mrs. Jordan, Miss Mellon had the opportunity of appearing in two of that lady's favourite characters; when the critics declared that 'she came very close in several points to her admirable original.' Miss Farren's retirement, to become Countess of Derby, in the following year, gave her further advantages. In June 1797 she again had an engagement at Liverpool, when her benefit (of which she took half) realised £270. Her benefits were always the principal consideration with the Entwistles, who still had the lion's share

of the money. In after years she used to tell a good story of an amusing but rather embarrassing occurrence in the Liverpool Theatre this summer.

‘I was to perform in a new piece, something like those pretty little affecting dramas they get up now at the minor theatres; and in my character I represented a poor, friendless, orphan girl, reduced to the most wretched poverty. A heartless tradesman persecutes the sad heroine for a heavy debt owing to him by her family, and insists on putting her in prison unless some one will go bail for her. The girl replies—“Then I have no hope—I have not a friend in the world.”—“What! will no one go bail for you to save you from prison?” asks the stern creditor.—“I have told you I have not a friend on earth,” was my reply. But just as I was uttering the words, my eyes were attracted by the movements of a sailor in the upper gallery, who, springing over the railing, was letting himself down from one tier to another, until finally reaching the pit, he bounded clear over the orchestra and foot-lights, and placed himself beside me in a moment, before I could believe the evidence of my senses. “Yes, you shall have *one* friend at least, my poor young woman,” said he, with the greatest expression of feeling in his honest, sun-burnt countenance. “I will go bail for you to any amount. And as for *you*” (turning to the frightened actor), “if you don’t bear a hand and shift your moorings, you lubber, it will be the worse for you when I come athwart your bows.’

Of course, the house was instantly in an uproar. Some laughed, others screamed, the sailor’s comrades cheered him on from the gallery, and there was such general confusion that the curtain had to be dropped, while the orchestra played the national anthem. Even when taken behind the scenes the gallant sailor was only pacified after the manager had come forward, under the pretence of being an old friend of the distressed girl, and, with a profusion of theatrical bank-notes, paid off the persecuting creditor.

In March 1798 the young actress made what was considered a great step forward in her profession in the part of Susan in *Follies of the Day*. It was a favourite part of Mrs.

Jordan's; but Miss Mellon's laughing, joyous manner was well suited to the character, and most people agreed that she *looked* it much better than her eminent predecessor. Later on she was given the part of Cowslip in *The Agreeable Surprise*, and performed with considerable success a character which eighteen years previously had made the name and fortune of 'Becky' Wells, and become so popular that 'Cowslip' hats and 'Cowslip' gowns were for a time all the rage. 'If the pretty inmate of Cowslip Hall were here, it would be a different thing,' said one of the papers, 'but as she is not, we have no objection to her very pretty substitute.' At this time, however, Miss Mellon's salary had not risen above £2 a week in London; and if it had not been for her profitable provincial engagements—especially at Liverpool, where this year she realised £240 by a benefit—she and her mother and step-father must have found some difficulty in making both ends meet. She was now in her twenty-first year; and Gibson, the violinist of the old Ulverstone Theatre, relates that when he saw her in Liverpool her appearance was very striking from the brilliancy of the contrast of her complexion, eyes, and teeth. Her features he found to be little altered; and if he had closed his eyes, he said, the sweet low sound of her voice might have persuaded him that he was again listening to the little child saying her lesson, or learning some of her future speeches. In January 1799, the illness of Mrs. Jordan again gave Miss Mellon the advantage of playing another of the celebrated actress's favourite parts; and later in the year she gained much praise for her fascinating impersonation of Celia in *As You Like It*. In 1800, the temporary retirement of Mrs. Jordan threw some more prominent parts to the younger actress's share; and during the two succeeding years she continued to rise steadily in her profession. In January 1803, in consequence of the illness of Miss Pope, she played that lady's part of Mrs. Page in

The Merry Wives of Windsor; and her success in this attempt seems to have formed one of her most agreeable recollections; for she treasured up the dress which she wore on the occasion, and even after she had become a Duchess would sometimes produce it to show to her visitors. When, in the course of the same month, she played Althea to Mrs. Jordan's Peggy, the *Morning Post* remarked that 'Miss Mellon, who in many respects most happily imitates Mrs. Jordan, drew, next after the latter, the greatest share of attention and applause,' adding that her manner was full of sweetness, simplicity, and refinement.

It was about this time that a gentleman named Barry, recently arrived from the West Indies, paid his addresses to her, and, apparently, engaged her affections. Her mother, who was more ambitious, was greatly incensed at the prospect of Harriot's alliance with a man not above her own rank, and did whatever she could to thwart the match. Nevertheless, had Barry confessed that he was not a man of means, the romantic actress would probably have married him—even if she had had to supply the means for their subsistence afterwards. But he invented a story about an ample allowance, and a rich old aunt to whom he was heir, which story was speedily discovered to be a barefaced imposition, and the young lady instantly refused to have anything more to do with him. 'This circumstance,' says her biographer, 'apparently seared her heart against risking "that fatal dream" again; for all who knew her unite in saying she never afterwards showed the least preference for any one of her admirers.' She had now become a person of some importance in the green-room; and her benefits had yielded so well for several years past that she was in possession of a considerable sum of money. She was therefore at last in a position to assert her independence; and as neither her mother's temper nor Mr. Entwisle's habits

showed any signs of improvement, she established them in a music-shop at Cheltenham, and took to live with her in Little Russell Street a young friend, who remained her constant companion for the following thirteen years. Harriot occasionally visited her mother during the holidays, and the latter sometimes came up to London; but the clash of tempers might be endured when it was only a temporary instead of a constant occurrence. Later on, her interest enabled her to get Mr. Entwisle appointed postmaster of Cheltenham—a post for which he was by no means fit, and in which he did her no credit. She also built a house for her mother in a suitable part of Cheltenham, for Mrs. Entwisle to let out in lodgings. Occasionally, when staying in the town, she played at the Cheltenham Theatre; and a benefit which she took there in September 1805 proved to be a crisis in her life. All the visitors to the place were of course asked to purchase tickets, and amongst them was an elderly invalid gentleman, whose name Mrs. Entwisle had been unable to discover, but whose servant had assured her that, notwithstanding his poor appearance, his master was considered one of the richest men in London. In the course of a day or two this gentleman sent five guineas, with the request that a box might be reserved for Mr. Coutts. A short note accompanying the money commended what the writer had heard of Miss Mellon's industry in her profession and kindness to her mother, and Mr. Coutts hoped that his trifling present would prove to be 'luck-money.' Harriot was always extremely superstitious; and as this happened to be the largest sum in gold she had ever yet received from any one person, and as the coins happened to be new guineas fresh from the Mint, she concluded that it must indeed be 'luck-money,' and that nothing should ever induce her to part with it. On the day of her marriage with Mr. Coutts, ten years afterwards, those five bright guineas were produced

by her from an old purse; and after the lapse of another twelve years they were again produced, and shown to her bridal party when she became Duchess of St. Albans.

Thomas Coutts, sole partner in the great banking-house in the Strand, was at this time seventy years of age. He was a man of eccentric character, who loved to go about shabbily dressed in order to be mistaken for an indigent person, and who was equally remarkable for his petty economies and great charities. He was a man of considerable accomplishments, who was admitted to the highest circles of society, and who had married his three daughters (notwithstanding that their mother had been one of his brother's domestic servants) to Sir Francis Burdett, the Earl of Guilford, and the Marquis of Bute, respectively. His wife was still living, but as she was advanced in years, as well as out of her mind, there seemed no harm in anticipating that she might predecease him. It has been said that at first neither Mrs. Entwisle nor her daughter had any notion that Mr. Coutts would ever marry the latter, but that they merely sought to take all the advantage they could of a weak and rich old man's patronage as long as it would last. From this opinion Harriot's biographer emphatically dissents, holding that from the moment of introduction Mrs. Entwisle had marked the rich old banker for her daughter's husband. At any rate the acquaintance seems to have been assiduously cultivated; and on his return to London Mr. Coutts presented Miss Mellon to his three daughters, with whom she appears within a very short time to have become extremely intimate. They used to meet their father at her house in Little Russell Street, or call there to drive him home; and they invited Harriot to their houses, both in London and in the country. Mrs. Entwisle, who was ambitious, clever, artful, and scheming, appears to have come up to London to direct the campaign in person. Mrs. Baron-Wilson says:—

‘Miss Mellon’s manner towards Mr. Coutts, which was totally different from her careless style, was doubtless the result of her mother’s tutorage, and certainly was politic in the extreme. It was steady and respectful, like a daughter, perfectly free from any levity . . . and, to prove her respect, no office was too humble ; for instance, she never allowed a servant to open the door when he knocked, but either went down herself, or requested the young lady living with her to do so. From her steady demeanour she was generally considered by her friends to be *an acknowledged daughter of Mr. Coutts*, and, from the friendship shown to her by his daughters, they had possibly formed a similar conclusion.’

At any rate it is clear, from their conduct afterwards, that they never thought their father ever intended to marry her. Harriot’s biographer says that Coutts was exactly the sort of person, and in exactly the position, to fall in with shrewd Mrs. Entwisle’s schemes. He had a great love of witty society, especially that of the green-room. The malady from which his wife suffered left him very lonely. He was very wealthy, and as shrewd in money matters as men who have made their own fortune usually are. But he was also eccentric in various ways ; beneath his shrewdness there was a strong vein of romance ; and he was peculiarly susceptible to soft words.

‘It will be readily seen what a chance there was for the wheedling Irishwoman and her respectful daughter, when they received a visit from the solitary millionaire, and devoted themselves to preparing all the trifling comforts which servants would not do of themselves, and their master (engrossed in business) forgot to order. In time he regularly took his luncheon in Little Russell Street, and if his family wanted to see him, they knew where to go.’

The following is given as a specimen of Mrs. Entwisle’s delicate attentions to Mr. Coutts. One day when he had been complaining of pains in his arms and legs, which made it very unpleasant for him to do the amount of walking which had been prescribed for the benefit of his failing

health, the shrewd Irishwoman suggested that perhaps his sleeves and his stockings were too tight, begging him to let her have a specimen of each that she might see whether some alteration could not be made. She found that the millionaire banker's flannel waistcoat had been patched and washed so often that it had shrunk into a little yellow, hard thing, like a washed glove, and that his worsted stockings had been darned in lumps over and over again, so that walking in them must have been a sort of purgatory. She very soon produced a dozen new waistcoats and pairs of stockings, with which the old gentleman was so pleased that he would talk of this kind addition to his comfort as though he were a poor, broken-down old clerk to whom a few good waistcoats and stockings were an unaffordable luxury.

The marked friendship of the Coutts family for Miss Mellon was not likely to pass without comment; and it was currently reported that an engagement, similar to that of Lord Derby with Miss Farren, had been entered into, by which, after the death of the afflicted Mrs. Coutts, Miss Mellon was destined to take her place. A well known legal gentleman assured Harriot's biographer that he knew of the existence of a bond between Mr. Coutts and Miss Mellon to the effect that if she would remain unmarried while his invalid wife survived, he would marry her as soon as his hand was free to offer. There has never been positive proof of the existence of any such bond; but a consideration of all the circumstances leaves little room for doubt that some such arrangement there must have been. Some of the comments on the matter, both of her professional friends and of the public press, were none too complimentary. Mrs. Baron-Wilson claims to have placed in its true light Miss Mellon's friendship for, and subsequent marriage to, Mr. Coutts; but in point of fact she has left the matter very much as she found it. The sum and substance of her

'vindication' is (1) that Coutts was so scrupulous about the reputation of his future wife that, in addition to introducing his friends to her house, he never allowed her to be without a female companion, 'a lady of good connections and irreproachable conduct,' who permanently resided with her; (2) that Miss Mellon always behaved to Mr. Coutts with such deference and sobriety of manner as to create an impression that she was his daughter; and (3) that Coutts encouraged this supposition in order to save his family from pain, and Miss Mellon from the awkwardness of being recognised as the future successor of Mrs. Coutts the first. The truth seems to be that Mrs. Baron-Wilson knew no more of the precise circumstances of the case than any of the slanderous scribblers whom she condemns; and whether Coutts, during the lifetime of his first wife, treated Miss Mellon as his mistress or his daughter is a matter on which, in the absence of any positive evidence, people will continue to arrive at different conclusions according to their several ways of thinking. Mrs. Wilson's logic is sometimes rather difficult to follow. We are apparently invited to conclude, for example, that because on one occasion the audience in the theatre and certain writers in the newspapers mistook a paste necklace which Miss Mellon had bought with her own money for a valuable diamond ornament which must have been given her by Mr. Coutts, therefore Mr. Coutts never gave her any such valuable presents. The story about this necklace is as follows. It had been made for Miss Mellon (as she herself declared) by a jeweller who was good enough to allow her to pay the six guineas which he charged for it by instalments of five shillings a week. She first sported this sparkling ornament when playing Lydia Languish in *The Rivals*; and when, after the end of one of the acts, she went into the box where Mr. Coutts was sitting with some of his grandchildren, they all laughed at so palpable an

imitation, and inquired—‘How much were your glass beads a pound?’ But the jeweller who had made the necklace, while sitting in the pit, admiring his own workmanship and thinking it ‘looked very well considering,’ overheard such remarks as—‘Miss Mellon in a diamond necklace!—a creature with three or four pounds a week only—it’s quite shameful!’ To which another scandalised pitite replied—‘That monied old banker would give her anything: Why, it must have cost him £10,000.’ And when she was subsequently observed in the box with Coutts and his family, their indignation became uncontrollable—‘that she should presume to appear among the family in the diamonds of which she had defrauded them, was really carrying daring too far!’ The papers got hold of the story, and contained paragraphs about a certain opulent old banker, and a certain actress, and a certain necklace. All this caused her to take a dislike to the bauble; and one day in the green-room she took it off, and clasping it round the neck of Miss Tidswell just as she was going on the stage, made that lady a present of the obnoxious thing. Miss Tidswell was very pleased with this addition to her stock of stage jewels; but next week the newspapers attacked her also, sarcastically remarking that ‘diamond necklaces are now the only wear on Drury Lane stage; another actress having appeared in one of great beauty, which a noble Duke had presented to her.’ Not long after this little episode, Miss Mellon sent a donation of £100 to the Drury Lane Fund, and a similar amount to that of Covent Garden. Her ability to show such liberality was accounted for by the announcement that a lottery ticket which had been bought for her by the actor Wewitzer had drawn a prize of £5000. But people were again incredulous; and notwithstanding Wewitzer’s particularisation of the number of the ticket and the office at which he had bought it, many, both among performers and the public, believed the

money to have come from Mr. Coutts. The truth is, says her biographer (not very consistently, by the way, with the story about paying for the six-guinea necklace by instalments of five shillings a week), 'Whether she was assisted by Mr. Coutts or not, she must by this time have been comparatively rich; for independent of her luck in the lottery, she had accumulated nearly £3000 by her provincial engagements, particularly those fulfilled at Liverpool, and was enabled not only to purchase the house in Little Russell Street, but also her more favourite Holly Lodge.' Whatever agreement there may have been, however, between Harriot and Mr. Coutts, and whatever assistance she may have received from him, her mother was evidently kept in ignorance of any such transaction, for that irascible lady seems to have lived in perpetual fear that her daughter would be inveigled into an imprudent match with somebody else; and she would frequently come up to London to expostulate whenever anything aroused her suspicions. One of the visitors introduced to the house in Little Russell Street by Mr. Coutts was Colonel Raguet, a Belgian officer, of good family and fortune, who was on a visit to this country. When Mrs. Entwisle heard reports of Harriot's partiality for this gentleman, she was furious. She rushed up to London by a night journey from Cheltenham, and, bursting into her daughter's room just after breakfast time, screamed out—'That starving black fellow! I'll be the death of him!' At first Harriot was unable to imagine the reason for her mother's excitement, little thinking it could be caused by Colonel Raguet, with whom she was not on terms of any extraordinary friendship, and who happened to be, moreover, neither starving nor black, but a very well-to-do, fair, light-haired person. But the irate Irishwoman soon grew more explicit, though not a whit less furious, exclaiming—'He shan't marry you, Harriot—I'll kill him

first! His very name proves he's a beggar. Mr. Raggy, indeed! Just think of your being called Mrs. Raggy!—a nasty, black, deceiving, fortune-hunting, foreign fellow! If you marry him, I'll be the death of both of you.' There was not the slightest fear. Harriot seems to have known well enough what she was about. And even had there been no alliance with Mr. Coutts in prospect, it is very doubtful, in view of Harriot's British prejudice as expressed in her last will and testament, whether she could ever have brought herself to marry a foreigner, however fair both his face and his fortune might have been.

On the 4th of January 1815, the first Mrs. Coutts died, and about a fortnight later, apparently, the old banker and Miss Mellon were privately married at St. Pancras Church, although the marriage was not announced until the 2nd of March. 'One of the most wicked of the falsehoods' told against Miss Mellon, says her biographer, was the statement that she was married to Mr. Coutts within a few days after his wife's death, a statement 'as false as it was revolting.' But by what subtle casuistry that which within a few days would have been revolting can be shown to have become fit and proper within a fortnight, Mrs. Baron-Wilson unfortunately does not condescend to inform us. On the 7th of February the actress made her final bow to an audience, although she apparently incurred a forfeit of £1000 for not completing her engagement. On that evening she appeared as Audrey in *As You Like It*, in a fanciful and pretty dress, consisting of 'a peculiar-shaped black velvet hat, a yellow jacket laced with black velvet, and a gold cross and heart on her throat; while the striped, full, and rather short petticoat revealed very neat feet and ankles, in little buckled shoes, and yellow silk stockings with black clocks.' She was generally considered the handsomest Audrey on the stage, and on this occasion received so much applause,

that when the early scenes were over she went into Mr. Coutts's box, flushed with success, and expecting further compliments. She was therefore rather surprised and disappointed when he took her by the hand and said that he hoped this would be her last appearance, as he could not bear to see her made up for the stage in such an absurd costume. There was no formal leave-taking. After her final scene, she stepped rather in advance of the other performers, and curtsied profoundly several times to the applauding audience, whispering to the astonished Touchstone, as she did so, that she should never be his Audrey again. Her sudden retirement, says her biographer, was in all probability due to those 'smart little yellow stockings with black clocks.' For a short time, notwithstanding the infirm state of Coutts's health, they continued to live apart as usual. But about a month afterwards, when she made her daily call, one of the physicians gravely announced that Mr. Coutts was much worse, whereupon, in her alarm, she clasped her hands and exclaimed: 'Good heavens! tell me all. I am his wife!' The secret being now out, it was arranged that she should at once take her proper place in his home; and on the 2nd of March their marriage was duly announced in *The Times*. The age of the bridegroom was eighty, that of the bride thirty-eight. Coutts's family appear to have been filled with indignation and dismay; but some of them evidently soon came to the conclusion that they must accept the inevitable, for on the first available occasion Mrs. Coutts was duly presented at Court by her step-daughter, the Countess of Guilford. At first her position must have been as much that of a nurse as of a wife; for Coutts's health was in so precarious a condition that it was considered necessary for him to have a resident medical attendant. The prudent Mrs. Coutts insisted on the engagement of a married doctor of middle age, in order

to give, as she thought, no scope for scandal. But, unfortunately, the middle-aged doctor's wife became jealous, and made a disturbance which caused her husband to lose his appointment. They were equally unlucky, in another way, with their second resident medical attendant; for, having to be superseded on account of his own ill-health, this poor man committed suicide. However, before long, Coutts, under her care, regained his usual state of health and strength; and for the last seven years of his life seems to have been perfectly content with his matrimonial bargain. Mrs. Entwisle lived just long enough to have the satisfaction of seeing her daughter the acknowledged wife of the rich old banker; but some four months after Harriot's marriage she died, and was buried with great splendour at Cheltenham. Entwisle, whom much ale had made corpulent and sedentary, was very fond of fishing, and when he was left alone his step-daughter proposed to settle £500 a year on him, and establish him in a pretty cottage on the banks of the Thames. But he declined both the cottage and the annuity, preferring the society of his old cronies at Cheltenham, and judging, truly enough, that whenever he wanted money he should only have to apply to Mrs. Coutts for as much as he required. He survived his wife four years, dying in 1819, and being buried with her at Cheltenham.

Both Mr. Coutts and his wife had always been famous for their hospitality, and when Holly Lodge, which was her favourite residence, had been enlarged and beautified, she had more scope for the rather theatrical display of her entertainments. Her visitors were of very various kinds. One day she would have four royal brothers—the Dukes of York, Clarence, Kent, and Sussex—to dinner; the next, perhaps, a small crowd of the children of her old theatrical friends. So long as her step-father lived, he was made welcome, in spite of his peculiar habits, which were particu-

larly distasteful to Mr. Coutts. And once, years after his death, when his brother and two sisters were on a visit to London, Mrs. Coutts had them out to stay for a month with her at Holly Lodge, notwithstanding that the Countess of Guilford and her daughters were then in the house, and that the portly Misses Entwisle were the sort of women who habitually smoked short clay pipes. To Mr. Coutts, perhaps, these latter visitors may not have been altogether unwelcome, for he had a passion for the society of eccentrics, and in his estimation to be odd was almost equivalent to being agreeable. The humorous and fantastic painter, Fuseli, was one of his favourite guests; and another (who, however, seems to have had nothing but a Baron Munchausen-like faculty for lying to recommend him), was a certain Doctor Ruddiman. There was great jealousy between these two eccentrics, Ruddiman never missing an opportunity of throwing ridicule on Fuseli's uncouth speech and manners, while the latter was always on the watch to detect the romancing doctor in a palpable invention. The following is a specimen of the kind of story Ruddiman would tell with the greatest gravity and circumstantiality. One day at dinner Mr. Coutts was boasting of a rick of hay which had been made entirely from the lawn of Holly Lodge. Dr. Ruddiman thereupon expressed a hope that it might not encounter the fate of a hay-rick he knew of, which had likewise been made from the grass of a lawn. Fuseli, anticipating the kind of thing that was coming, began to snort vigorously, but Mr. Coutts motioned to the veracious doctor to proceed, and he related the following curious experience:

‘I was visiting one day, at the luncheon hour, a family who had a most beautiful villa, with long French windows opening on a lawn, and commanding a view of the river. Close by the bank of the stream was a stack of hay, which had been made there

some time before; and I chanced to be looking at it when, suddenly, I doubted the evidence of my senses, for I thought it moved! I looked again, and was convinced—the hay-stack was actually receding gradually away from the river side. Unable to speak, I pointed it out to the assembled party at the table; and their consternation equalled my own. We watched the movement of the hay-stack as it slowly and majestically glided along, until it had advanced twice its own breadth; after which there were several oscillations, as if it were settling comfortably in its new situation, and at last it was completely motionless. The master of the house, a person of great courage, now came to the determination that there must be thieves within it . . . so he sallied forth with a long rusty rapier, and stabbing the hay-rick in every direction, gave orders for its immediate demolition. The gardeners obeyed, though with great caution; and when they took to pieces the lower layer, what do you thing we saw? Hundreds, thousands, millions, of *field mice*, who scampered off to the former station of the hay-rick, and were quickly underground past our reach. On examining the upper part of this colony, the hay proved to be very damp and mildewed, so these sagacious little creatures had discovered their shelter was too near the water, and having unanimously agreed to work all together, had actually moved away the friendly rick to a dry spot!’

‘Uh!’ ejaculated Fuseli. ‘Dit onny pody effere hear suche a tomd ——,’ when he was interrupted by Mr. Coutts, from whose eyes tears were falling thick and fast with excessive laughter at this moving tale. When staying at Brighton, a place of which both Mr. and Mrs. Coutts were very fond, they gave large dinner-parties at their hotel on the New Steyne every day. It might have been expected that Mrs. Baron-Wilson, who represents her heroine as a bright and witty conversationist, would have given us a specimen or two of the brilliant talk that took place at these festive gatherings. But the only *bon mot* in the whole of her two volumes is the pun attributed to Mrs. Coutts in the following story. When Lord Erskine came to Brighton he said to Mrs. Coutts that if she would give

him a dinner, he would provide the fish from his own ponds. She agreed, and his present proved to be an enormous pike, weighing between thirty and forty pounds, which looked so hideous when placed on the table that not one of the guests would venture to taste it. Not wishing to pay Lord Erskine the bad compliment of sending his fish away as uneatable, she said on the spur of the moment that this splendid fish had merely been served up for the company to look at, the eating of it being a treat in store for a number of bathing women and their husbands, who were that evening going to the play at her expense. To make her word good, she had twenty or thirty of these people hastily summoned, and after they had demolished the fish and other edibles in the kitchen below, they were duly packed off to the theatre. The Coutts party also went to the theatre; and as soon as they entered their box, a party of fisher-folk in the pit were observed bowing and curtsying towards them. 'I suppose, Mrs. Coutts,' remarked Lord Erskine, 'those are your ragged staff.' 'Indeed they are not,' was the reply, 'they are my *pike staff*!'

Mrs. Coutts was extremely superstitious. The marble steps leading from the lawn to the hall door of Holly Lodge were disfigured by two old, rusty broken horse-shoes, which she had picked up in the road. She obliged her guests to eat mince-pies on New Year's Day, and tansy-pudding at Easter; to wear hawthorn on May Day, and holly at Christmas. She was strictly observant of fortunate days, birth-days, wedding-days, and all the old festivals of the calendar. Nothing would ever induce her to sit down thirteen at table; and after eating an egg she would always make a hole at the bottom end of the shell, so that witches might not find shelter there. As her biographer puts it, 'her fanciful mind delighted in tracing an omen, a warning, a sort of aerial agency, in matters of ordinary occurrence; dreams were

cited as demanding credence; supernatural agency was but partially doubted; and an evil prognostic ensured the relinquishment of any expedition.' There were two of her dreams which she used frequently to cite as having been unmistakably fulfilled. The first of these was a dream of peculiar vividness, which haunted her for a long time, and in which she appeared to have been tried for her life, sentenced to be hanged, and actually executed. One day, while the theatrical *coiffeur*, Anderson, was preparing her for the stage, she happened to mention the recurrence of this unpleasant dream. But Anderson, who was considered an authority on such matters, at once declared it to be a fine dream, indicating that she would become a great lady, and perhaps even be presented at Court. There seemed little prospect of any such destiny at the time for an ordinary actress earning three or four pounds a week; but she at once promised the prognosticator that if ever she were presented at Court, he alone should dress her hair for the occasion. Twenty years after, when Lady Guilford was to present her after her marriage with Mr. Coutts, the dream and its interpretation occurred to her mind; the old *coiffeur* was discovered at Worthing; and nothing would satisfy her but that he should come up to London, so that her promise as well as his prophecy should be fulfilled. Few of the theatrical hairdresser's prognostications, we may presume, turned out so profitable to him as this one; for from this date until 1836, whenever his superstitious customer attended a drawing-room, he was fetched up from Worthing to dress her hair for the occasion, and each time was presented with the sum of £30. The other dream was likely enough suggested by the *Arabian Nights*, or some other of the wild tales in which she delighted. She seemed to be wandering through a huge castle in which were numerous chambers containing heaps of golden coins, and

studded with diamonds, rubies, and other precious stones. Fearful of being discovered among such treasures, she endeavoured to escape; but on reaching the door by which she had entered she found it now guarded by two large chained lions. After some hesitation, she rushed out between these furious beasts, who both sprang at her, but inflicted no injury. Then, turning to look back as she ran, she fell into a river, and the shock awakened her. This vision was considered of such importance that it was carefully written out and sent to a coach-maker in Drury Lane, who had a reputation as a dream expounder. His interpretation was that the dream indicated great temptations lying before her, but that she would pass through them all unscathed. Although this dream did not indicate wealth in any way, the coach-maker added,—‘Never mind your being poor now, Miss Mellon; your good luck will some day bring you the means of keeping a carriage.’ To which Miss Mellon, after her manner, replied that if she ever did have a carriage, he should certainly be the builder of it. And, as things turned out, not only did Miss Mellon give him the order for the first carriage she ever possessed, but as Mrs. Coutts and as Duchess of St. Albans, would never have a carriage made by anybody but the man whom she dubbed her ‘good oracle.’ It may seem scarcely necessary to comment on this sort of thing. But one may perhaps be permitted to remark that the friends of Mrs. Coutts who found anything very extraordinary in these dream interpretations were very easily satisfied. If the *coiffeur* had said that she would marry a Duke, or the coach-maker had told her that she would have two husbands, the first nearly half a century older and the second nearly a quarter of a century younger than herself, then there might have been a case to bring before the Psychical Research Society.

On the 2nd of March 1822, seven years after their marriage,

Thomas Coutts died, at the age of eighty-seven, leaving the whole of his vast fortune to his widow. For a time her step-daughters appear to have held aloof; and of course it was only natural that they should feel aggrieved. But she treated them with a generosity which they had not anticipated, and harmonious relations were once more restored. The press teemed with malicious stories and paragraphs about the wealthy widow; and unscrupulous literary hacks put together fictitious and scandalous biographies of her, with the view of extorting money. A clergyman of the Church of England had the impudence to call on her and ask £100 for the copyright of such a concoction. One day a well-dressed man obtained an interview with her on another pretence, and then produced the MS. of a similar 'Life' of herself, which he offered to suppress in exchange for a certain stipulated sum. As he denied being the author of the libellous work, she asked him what part he took in the affair. 'That of a principal,' was the reply. 'Then, sir,' rejoined the indignant lady, 'you may remember I am a principal, too,' and throwing the MS. into the fire she held it there with a poker until it was consumed. Failing to extort money in this fashion, some of these disreputable *littérateurs* managed to get their scurrilous *Memoirs* published; and although none of them appear to have met with any great success, they must have been exceedingly mortifying both to her and to those connected with her. She seems to have shown a most romantic, not to say theatrical, devotion to her husband's memory. To the end of her life his statue was the principal ornament of her state room, and his picture of her favourite boudoir. The pillow on which he lay when he died was always placed in her carriage when she travelled, and she would never sleep on any other. She frequently went to sit and read in what had been his sitting-room in the Strand; and on every anniversary of her

wedding-day she paid a visit to the Bank and pressed her lips to the desk at which the late lamented Coutts had been accustomed to write. But she had no notion of becoming a recluse; and as soon as the customary period of mourning was over, she reappeared in society in all her usual high spirits, and, as some said, with even more than her usual ostentation. A handsome and lively widow of forty-five, reputed to be worth about a million and a half of money, would not be likely to remain long without offers of another partnership; and we hear of numerous suitors for her hand, including that amorous and impecunious actor Elliston, and that equally amorous and impecunious prince, the Duke of York. But she was in no hurry to part with her freedom or her money.

Mrs. Coutts first met her future second husband, then Lord Burford, at a dinner-party which had been got up for the purpose of enabling that shy young nobleman to pay his addresses to a young lady, a great heiress, who was duly there to be courted. But instead of doing what was expected of him, Lord Burford sat beside Mrs. Coutts all the evening, and seemed so attracted by her conversation, that the Duke, his father, requested permission to call on her at Holly Lodge. Lord Burford's other matrimonial project was soon abandoned, and, being ably seconded by his father, he laid siege to the wealthy widow, who was over twenty years his senior. In July 1825, the father died, and Lord Burford became Duke of St. Albans. Some little time afterwards, Mrs. Coutts, accompanied by the young Duke and his sister, Lady Charlotte Beauclerk, set out on a tour through Scotland. As Lockhart remarks, no person of such consequence could, in those days, have thought a Scotch progress complete unless it included a reception at Abbotsford; and in his *Life of Scott*, he gives the following interesting account of the lady and her reception. Scott, it appears, had visited

her in London during Coutts's lifetime, and was very willing to do the honours of Teviotdale in return.

'But although she was considerate enough not to come on him with all her retinue (leaving four of the seven carriages with which she travelled at Edinburgh), the appearance of only three coaches, each drawn by four horses, was rather trying for poor Lady Scott. They contained Mrs. Coutts—her future lord the Duke of St. Albans—one of his Grace's sisters—a *dame de compagnie* (vulgarly styled a toady)—a brace of physicians—for it had been considered that one doctor might himself be disabled in the course of an expedition so adventurous—and, besides other menials of every grade, two bed-chamber women for Mrs. Coutts's own person; she requiring to have this article also in duplicate, because, in her widowed condition, she was fearful of ghosts—and there must be one Abigail for the service of the toilette, a second to keep watch by night. With a little puzzling and cramming, all this train found accommodation;—but it so happened that there were already in the house several ladies, Scotch and English, of high birth and rank, who felt by no means disposed to assist their host and hostess in making Mrs. Coutts's visit agreeable to her. They had heard a great deal, and they saw something, of the ostentation almost inseparable from wealth so vast as had come into her keeping. They were on the outlook for absurdity and merriment; and I need not observe how effectively women of fashion can contrive to mortify, without doing or saying anything that shall expose them to the charge of actual incivility.'

During dinner Sir Walter could keep this spirit of mischief in subjection; but it was easy to see that Mrs. Coutts followed the other ladies to the drawing-room in no very complacent mood, and that there was danger of an explosion. Sir Walter therefore cut the gentlemen's 'sederunt' short, and as soon as he could join the ladies, managed to draw aside the youngest, gayest, and cleverest of them (a lovely Marchioness), and give her a well-merited lecture. He told her he knew it was not uncommon among the fine ladies in London to accept, and even hunt after, invitations to Mrs. Coutts's grand balls and fêtes, and then,

if they met her afterwards at another house, to 'tip the cold shoulder.' This he denounced as shabby behaviour; and then pointed out that the way in which Mrs. Coutts was being treated in his house was not much better. It had been well enough known that she was coming to stay two or three days at Abbotsford, and those who did not wish to meet her had had ample time to 'go away.' Consequently he had a perfect right to expect those who remained to help him out with his visitor. The beautiful young peeress thanked him for speaking to her as if she had been a daughter; and in a very short time put matters into a different train, so that in the course of half an hour the lively widow was quite at her ease, rattling away at comical anecdotes of her theatrical days; and at the conclusion of her visit she departed apparently as much pleased with Sir Walter's guests as she was with himself. Scott subsequently noted in his diary:—

'Mrs. Coutts, with the Duke of St. Albans and Lady Charlotte Beauclerk, called to take leave of us. When at Abbotsford his suit threw but coldly. She made me, I believe, her confidant in sincerity. She had refused him twice, and decidedly. He was merely on the footing of friendship. I urged it was akin to love. She allowed she might marry the Duke, only she had at present not the least intention that way. Is this frank admission more favourable for the Duke than an absolute protestation against the possibility of such a marriage? I think not. It is the fashion to attend Mrs. Coutts's parties, and to abuse her. I have always found her a kind, friendly woman, without either affectation or insolence in the display of her wealth, and most willing to do good if the means be shown to her. She can be very entertaining, too, as she speaks without scruple of her stage life. So much wealth can hardly be enjoyed without some ostentation. But what then? If the Duke marries her, he ensures an immense fortune; if she marries him, she has the first rank. . . . The disparity of ages concerns no one but themselves; so they have my consent to marry if they can get each other's. Just as this is written, enter my Lord of St. Albans and Lady Charlotte, to beg I would

recommend a book of sermons to Mrs. Coutts. Much obliged for her good opinion : recommended Logan's—one poet should always speak for another. The mission, I suppose, was a little display on the part of good Mrs. Coutts of authority over her high aristocratic suitor. I do not suspect her of turning *dévoté*, and retract my consent given as above unless she remains “lively, brisk, and jolly.”

Sir Walter apparently did not know that Mrs. Coutts, like her mother, had been extremely pious from her youth up,—a characteristic, by the way, of both her husbands likewise. Her biographer assures us that the minute-book of prayers and meditations of Queen Catherine Parr was always carried about her person. And the importance which she attached to a strict observance of her daily private devotions is illustrated by the following incident. When she was to take her place for the first time in the peeresses' gallery at the opening of Parliament, she remembered just as she was about to step into her carriage that in the hurry of preparation for this important event her usual daily devotions had been forgotten. The carriage was instantly dismissed ; and instead of attending the ceremony which she had looked forward to with so much eagerness, she retired to her own room for the rest of the morning, fearful that otherwise some misfortune would follow from what she regarded as a case of culpable negligence.

Mrs. Coutts's answer to the Duke's proposal of marriage had apparently been that if a young man, just come into his title, were to marry so precipitately he might very likely regret it afterwards ; but if he were of the same mind at the end of a year from that date, she might then be induced to accept him. During that year they were much together ; and she used to say she became exceedingly attached to her handsome young Duke, and quite vexed when people talked of the possibility of his marrying any other person. At the

end of the specified time the Duke renewed his offer; and they were married, by special licence, on the 16th of June 1827, in her house in Stratton Street. We are told that the young Duke cannot have married Mrs. Coutts for her money—as of course it was reported that he did—because he declined having any settlement made on himself, either during her lifetime or to take effect after her death. At her death, as will be seen, he was left only a comparatively moderate life annuity. But during her lifetime she probably treated her husband as liberally as though she were the Duke and he the Duchess; and we are told that her wedding present to him was a draft for £30,000. Her elevation to the peerage seems to have made no essential change in her behaviour and habits; and she was as free, after as before, in referring to her lowly origin or her theatrical career. ‘When I was a poor girl, working hard for my thirty shillings a week,’ would often be the preface to some lively story the Duchess would tell in her own drawing-room at St. Albans House, and she exhibited a similar unaffectedness on more public occasions. In 1828, for example, when she and the Duke returned to their hotel after attending the musical festival at Liverpool, there was so great a crowd before the door that the police had to force a passage for her. But when she saw some of the crowd being rather roughly handled, she interposed, and begged that no force might be used on her account to any inhabitant of Liverpool, for, said she, ‘most probably some of their family were kind enough to *pay* for seeing me at the theatre in my younger days.’ During the later years of her life the Duchess spent much of her time at Brighton; and some interesting reminiscences of her way of life there were communicated by a literary gentleman who was much in her society. She was often glad to escape from the crowd and heat of her great entertainments, he says, to chat

with him in a quiet corner about olden times, green-room jokes, actors, plays, and play-writers. Few persons, she would say, had seen so much of the two extremes of life as herself; and in contrasting high life with low she by no means gave an unqualified preference to the former.

‘The society in which I formerly moved was all cheerfulness, all high spirits—all fun, frolic, and vivacity; they cared for nothing, thought of nothing, beyond the pleasures of the present hour, and to those they gave themselves up with the utmost relish. Look at the circles in which I now move; can anything be more “weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable” than their whole course of life? Why, we might as well be in the treadmill, as toiling in the stupid, monotonous round of what they call pleasure, but which is, in fact, very cheerless and heavy work. Pleasure, indeed! when all merriment, all hilarity, all indulgence of our natural emotions, if they be of a joyous nature, is declared to be vulgar. I hate that horrid word—it is a perfect scarecrow to the fashionable world; but it never frightens me; for I had rather be deemed “unfashionable” occasionally than moping and melancholy at all times.’

If it were not for the merry and frequent laugh of dear old General Phipps, she declared, her dinner parties would have been more like funeral feasts. There appeared to be no such thing as youth in high life; people were old when they first came out, the men all grave and reverend signors, and the girls prim duennas, even in their teens. They were too fine and fastidious for anything; but though this world was apparently not good enough for them, she inclined to the Methodist parson’s opinion that some of them might go further and fare worse. She certainly did her best to counteract any such melancholy slowness at Brighton, and by her parties, excursions, and festivities of all kinds constituted herself a sort of mistress of the revels in the place. The most novel and attractive of her entertainments are said to have been the hawking-parties she instituted on the neighbouring Downs.

‘Habited in green velvet, with a black hat and feathers, and a superb diamond hawk suspended from her girdle, the Duchess, with her carriage and suite in full state, started for the place of rendezvous. The Duke, who is a capital horseman, rode at her side, in the handsome costume of a grand falconer, or galloped forward with a hawk on his wrist, attended by numerous falconers and servants in green liveries, and a numerous bevy of horsemen eager to follow all his movements. After the luckless heron had been thrown up, and the hawk was in full pursuit, it was a gallant and striking spectacle to see a numerous field of equestrians, of whom a great proportion were females, galloping over the wide Downs in the direction of the chase, now lost in an intervening hollow, now gradually emerging, and racing up the opposite hill—a process repeated two or three times, till the whole cavalcade was finally lost in the distance, or seen halting upon some eminence that overhung the ocean.’

When the field sports were over, the invited spectators returned to St. Albans House, where music, singing, a grand banquet, and dancing, concluded the festivities of the busy day. Another fault which the Duchess had to find with the denizens of the high society in which she now moved was their fondness for late hours. The hour of meeting was not only specified, but always underlined on her invitation cards; but as many guests were in the habit of going to two or three other parties before they put in an appearance at hers, she was sometimes kept up a great deal later than suited either her temper or her health. On one occasion, annoyed at the emptiness of her rooms two or three hours after the prescribed time of assemblage, and knowing from former experience that there would be a great crowd of late-comers, she gave orders for the street door to be shut, and no more visitors admitted that night. Presently a party of cavalry officers arrived, and receiving no answer to repeated knocks of the usual kind, began to batter with the hilts of their swords on the door. Carriage after carriage drove up, without being able to set down its

occupants, and before long the whole street was full of belated guests. She would have stood the siege all night long, she declared, but that some of the more artful of her excluded visitors bribed the servants to let them down the area steps, and by passing through the offices and up the kitchen stairs obtained access to the drawing-room, when she considered it best to surrender at discretion. According to the Brighton literary gentleman, her Grace's notions of amusement were not of a particularly intellectual character. In disguises, comic recitations and songs, jests, imitations, jugglers, and ventriloquists, she took great delight; and she would have Rice down from London to black his face and sing that popular but intensely stupid song of *Jim Crow*. But it is less for this kind of thing than for the account of several little private talks he had with her that his reminiscences are valuable. One day when he had been dining at St. Albans House, the Duchess beckoned him from the drawing-room into an inner apartment, and despatched one of her pages for a particular casket.

“On opening it she took out some papers, which she placed in my hands, saying that she wished me to read them. They were letters of considerable length from her late husband, Mr. Coutts, alluding to the many and unjustifiable attempts that had been made to alienate his affections from her, which he vehemently condemned, while he poured forth a fervent and most exalted eulogium upon herself, not only declaring her whole conduct to have been irreproachable, but plainly intimating, as it appeared to me, the perfect purity of her life, when, from her sudden enrichment and other circumstances, a contrary impression had been produced upon the public mind.”

When he remarked that such documents must be a most valuable solace to her, she informed him that she never travelled without them; and whenever vexed or annoyed, the perusal of them, though for the hundredth time, would bring her comfort and peace. After then singing the

praises of the late Mr. Coutts for some time, she said, 'I will now show you what I have done for his family.'

'She then drew from the casket a small manuscript book, in which were inserted the names of the several relatives, the sums she had paid them annually, and the total to which these payments amounted in the eleven years that had then elapsed since the death of Mr. Coutts. The gross amount, if I recollect rightly, was about £335,000! I know that I calculated it at £30,000 a year. Her Grace then spoke in the most affectionate terms of Miss Angela Burdett, declaring that she had been singularly fortunate in her baptismal appellation, since she was truly angelic by nature as well as by name.'

The gross amount of these benefactions seems to have taken the Brighton literary gentleman's breath away; but we must bear in mind that the money was given to the children of the man who had bequeathed what most people regarded as *their* fortunes to her; that it involved no sacrifice on her part, because she could not possibly feel the loss of any such sum; and that it left her with an income at least five times as great as any ordinary person (even among those brought up to the use of wealth) can manage to spend without doing a great deal of mischief.

In June 1837 she had a severe illness of a nervous character, and all visitors were interdicted from the house in Stratton Street. One day she asked to be taken to Holly Lodge in the carriage which had driven Mr. Coutts there for the last time. Then, after being drawn in his pony-chair round every walk and alley of the place, she desired to be taken back to Stratton Street. When one day towards the end of July she observed that her bed had been placed in the large drawing-room downstairs in order to give her the benefit of more air, she requested to be taken up again, that she might die on the bed where Tom Coutts had breathed his last; and there, on the 6th of August 1837, she died. With the exception of an annuity of £10,000, together with

a legacy of £10,000 and two of her houses to the Duke of St. Albans, and a number of ample though comparatively insignificant legacies and annuities to relations and servants, she bequeathed the whole of her great fortune to her niece Angela, the lady since so well known to two generations as the Baroness Burdett-Coutts. Her last will and testament contained one or two indications of her domineering spirit and whimsical animosity. Failing Angela Burdett, or a son to succeed her, the whole of the fortune was to devolve upon that lady's sister Johanna; failing Johanna or a son to succeed her, upon another sister, Clara; failing Clara, or a son to succeed her, upon Dudley Coutts Marjoribanks; failing him, or a son to succeed him, upon Coutts Lindsay; and failing him, or a son to succeed him, upon the partners for the time being in Coutts's banking house. But if any of these beneficiaries failed to take within six months the name of Coutts, or if any of them married an alien, their inheritance was to be forfeit. And with regard to her husband, the Duke, it was stipulated that if he should permit his uncle, Lord Amelius Beauclerk, or any of his family, or either of the Duke's brothers—Lord Frederick or Lord Charles Beauclerk—or either of their families, to reside with him in either of the houses devised to him by this will, or in any other house inhabited by him for the time being, for the space of one week (either at one time or at several distinct times) in any one year, then the Duke was to be deprived of his annuity and legacies 'as if he were dead.' It cannot be said that the Duchess made a particularly ill use of her wealth while living; and she certainly did an act of justice by restoring it at her death to the family of the man from whom she had received it. James Boaden aptly summed up both her private and her professional career in the remark that, had Mrs. Jordan never appeared, Miss Mellon might have risen to the front rank as an actress; and that

she did rise to the front rank in private life by reason of her uncommon sagacity. Mrs. Baron-Wilson made a mistake in demanding our admiration for the Duchess's habitual grammatical precision of speech, for her exquisite and 'surprising' taste in the fine arts, for her deep reading (in magazines!), and for the good breeding which, we are told, was commended by his fastidious Majesty George the Fourth. She was by no means faultless; but if it must be admitted that she was wilful, haughty, hasty-tempered, absurdly superstitious, and a little more vindictive than was quite consistent with her somewhat ostentatious piety, on the credit side it must be set down that she was a dutiful and affectionate daughter to a very trying mother, a generous friend, a charitable and at the same time discriminating helper of all who were in distress; and, for the rest, a cheerful, witty, high-spirited, unaffected woman, who knew how to make herself respected in the early days of her poverty, and who certainly did no discredit to the high station in society to which she afterwards happened to be raised.

THE END

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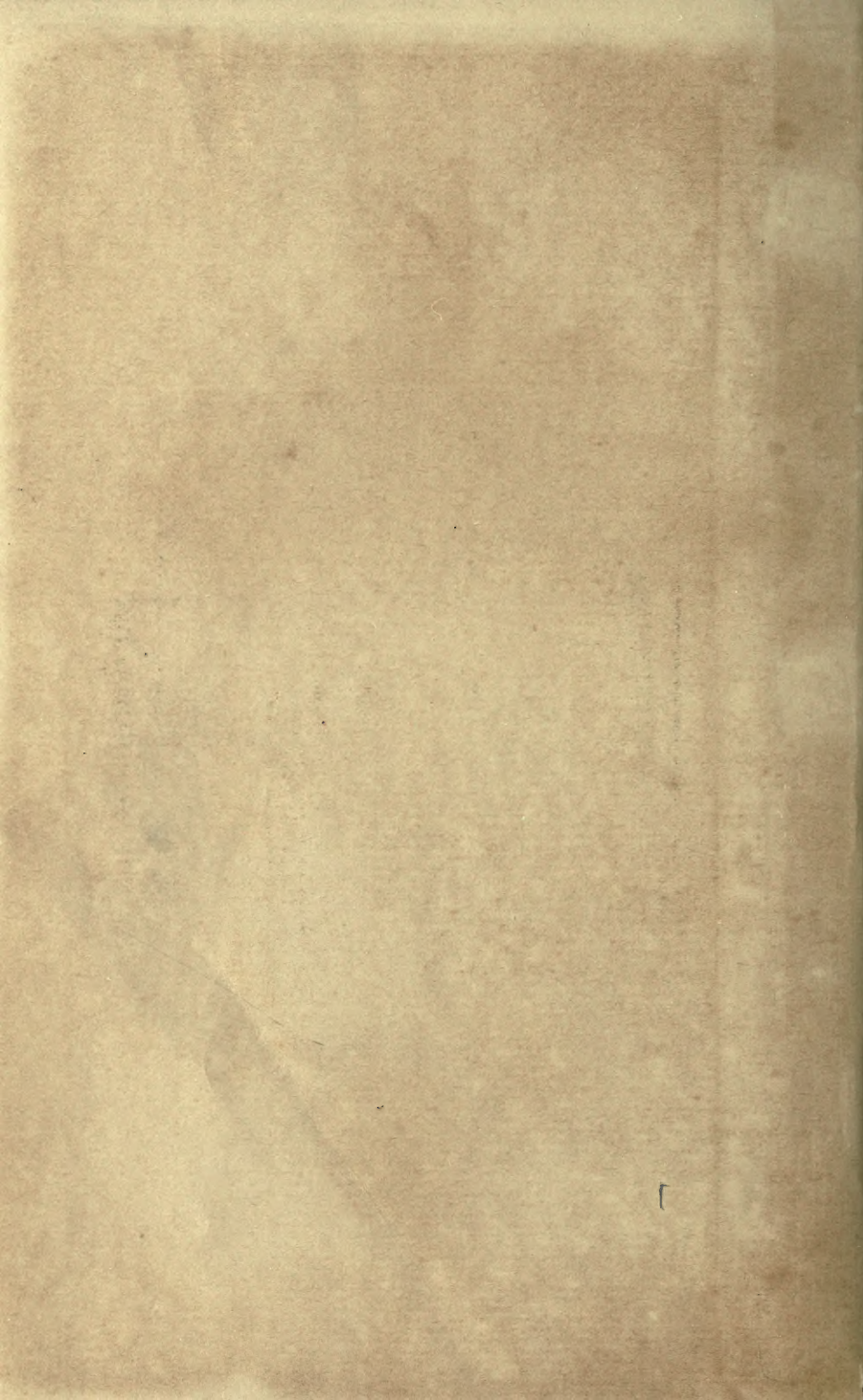
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